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Resourcing General McChrystal's Counterinsurgency Campaign

The 2009 "Troop-to-Task" Planning Effort to Determine the Right Force Package Necessary to Defeat the Insurgency in Afghanistan

Matthew C. Brand
Colonel, USAF

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About the Author

Col Matthew Brand is a faculty member at Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. Prior to arriving at Maxwell, Colonel Brand was the United States Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR–A) command historian from June 2009 to June 2010, where he chronicled the activities of Gen Stanley McChrystal during his year as the USFOR–A commander. After graduating from Specialized Undergraduate Navigator Training in 1988, Colonel Brand flew approximately 3,400 hours during a variety of operational assignments as an HC-130 and MC-130P navigator for Air Force Special Operations Command before arriving at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 2001 to attend the US Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC). From 2002 through 2007, Colonel Brand remained at Fort Leavenworth, first serving as an instructor at the CGSC, where he taught joint and multinational operations, air operations, and special operations, and then as deputy commander of Detachment 1, 505th Command and Control Wing, helping to integrate airpower into the Army Battle Command Training Program. Colonel Brand was then assigned to Fort Rucker, Alabama, from 2007 to 2009, as the LeMay Center for Doctrine Development and Education operating location director, ensuring that the doctrinally correct application of airpower was presented to the US Army Aviation Center of Excellence academic programs, exercises, and war games. Returning from his previously mentioned deployment to Afghanistan in June 2010, Colonel Brand became the LeMay Center's director of staff at Maxwell Air Force Base until his arrival at Air War College in November 2011. Colonel Brand earned a bachelor of science degree in business administration from California State University at Northridge in 1987, a master of arts degree in management from Webster University in 1997, and a master's degree in military arts and sciences, history option, from CGSC in 2007.

Abstract

In the summer and fall of 2009, General Stanley McChrystal and his small operational planning team went through an exhaustive "troop-to-task" analysis to determine the right force increase to properly resource his newly recommended "protect-the-population" counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy. Informed by the operational planning team (OPT), General McChrystal recommended to the president that approximately 43,000 new forces be sent to Afghanistan.

The OPT's analysis was divided into two primary areas. First, the team conducted a detailed quantitative analysis using a variety of COIN resourcing theories and applying them to the complex operating environment in Afghanistan. Second, the OPT conducted a thorough qualitative assessment using the bottom up recommendations of commanders at lower echelons throughout Afghanistan concerning what they thought was the appropriate number of forces to conduct General McChrystal's new strategy in their areas of operation. General McChrystal, along with his new deputy commander, Lt Gen David Rodriguez, heavily influenced this second "qualitative" area, as they absorbed all of the lower echelon assessments, along with all of the other information from Afghan, US, and NATO sources in-country. The two paths of analysis, quantitative and qualitative, both came up with added force requirements that were remarkably similar: approximately 40,000 and 45,000 new forces respectively. Thus, the two analytic approaches seemed to validate each other and were further reinforced by General McChrystal's own instincts after he led a separate, all-encompassing analysis of the state of the Afghan insurgency captured in his report, *COMISAF's Initial Assessment,* submitted to the president on 30 August 2009.

This narrative focuses on the process that General McChrystal's OPT went through as it conducted its research and analysis of a variety of COIN theories applied to the difficult operating environment in Afghanistan. External pressures complicated the analysis. Public and political support deteriorated in both the United States and Europe because of rising costs—in terms of casualties and funding—and the perception that the Afghan government grew increasingly corrupt. With these factors in mind, and knowing that the president was conducting another National Security Council review on US involvement in Afghanistan, General McChrystal "locked down" the troop-to-task OPT for fear of leaks getting back to Washington, DC, that might be perceived as the military commander trying to publicly pressure his commander in chief into providing more forces. Thus, for most of this planning effort, only a small number of hand-picked planners took part in this vitally important OPT, almost all of them graduates of advanced planning courses such as the US

Army's School of Advanced Military Studies. These planners produced remarkable and historic work that "showed the math" behind General McChrystal's force increase recommendation. On 1 December 2009, President Obama announced that he would add 30,000 new troops to Afghanistan and would support General McChrystal's new COIN strategy. Time will tell if this planning effort and these new forces will be the catalyst for a successful conclusion to this long and bloody conflict.

Preface

I arrived at Kabul International Airport, Afghanistan, in the early morning hours of 12 June 2009 in the back of a C-130 packed with Georgia National Guard soldiers beginning their year-long rotation into the hostile environment of eastern Afghanistan. As the new United States Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR–A) command historian, I would be chronicling what would be General McChrystal's only year as the US and NATO commander, a historic year of change that would halt the momentum of Taliban advances and begin the implementation of a newly resourced protect-the-population strategy carried out by US, coalition, and Afghan forces in the war-torn nation.

Because of the urgency of the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and dissatisfaction with the prosecution of the counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign, Pres. Barack Obama relieved Gen David McKiernan and replaced him with General Stanley McChrystal. The president had made it clear that, as commander in chief, he would focus on Afghanistan—a campaign that he believed had been badly neglected by the focus on Operation Iraqi Freedom. To this point, in his first month as commander in chief, he had approved an additional 21,000 previously requested forces that were arriving and employing as General McChrystal took command. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates told General McChrystal, just prior to the latter's assumption of command, to take 60 days, perform an assessment, and report back what he thought he needed to turn the war around in favor of the US-led coalition. To General McChrystal, the implication was clear. If his assessment was that more forces were needed, he was to send this request back, and the administration would likely look upon it favorably.

To those of us on the command staff, arriving in the late spring and early summer of 2009, there was a sense of urgency and importance that accompanied the arrival of General McChrystal. After all, US presidents rarely relieve operational commanders, and when they do, it is usually a sign that things are not going well and need to be fixed as soon as possible. Additionally, Secretary Gates had given General McChrystal only 60 days to do a complete assessment of the operational situation in Afghanistan and provide a recommendation back up the chain of command. There was no time for casual theater indoctrination for General McChrystal and his new staff, but instead, a rapid, almost frenetic pace began, personally pushed by the new coalition commander himself, all the way down the chain of command.

Performing a complex 60-day assessment is complicated enough in the middle of a vicious COIN campaign, but adding to the difficulty was a growing shift in public support against US involvement in the Afghanistan fight during

this assessment period. Americans had scarcely recovered from the shock of the financial crisis that hit the United States late in 2008, sending the nation into a recession, and now the shaken US citizenry was hit with constant news of rapidly rising casualties and ever increasing reports of corruption at all levels of the Afghan government. The "good war" in Afghanistan was suddenly being scrutinized more closely, not just by the general public, but by those on Capitol Hill as well. Many Americans began to question whether the cost of all the blood and resources was really worth it. It soon became apparent to those of us on General McChrystal's staff that the president himself seemed to be reconsidering the national strategy with regard to Afghanistan and the level of further US commitment of resources to go along with it. This shift was very rapid and was actually occurring throughout General McChrystal's strategic 60-day assessment of the Afghan situation.

With a national debate on US involvement in Afghanistan playing out daily in the editorial pages of influential newspapers and with his strategic assessment nearing its completion, General McChrystal realized that the best course for Afghanistan was a more fully resourced protect-the-population COIN strategy. Realizing that this recommendation would likely be controversial during this perceived national reassessment of US involvement in Afghanistan, General McChrystal knew he would have to convince critics back in the States that he had done his homework and, as he put it, shown the math behind any troop request he might make. Thus, he decided to break his assessment into two parts. The overarching 60-day initial assessment, or "strategic assessment" as it was known by the staff involved, would recommend the new strategy, and it would state that "additional resources would be required," but no specific numbers of additional forces would be contained within the strategic assessment report. The specifics of the additional forces required would be a separate follow-on request to the president after the 60-day assessment. A lot of work had gone into the strategic assessment, and it was a comprehensive review of the growing insurgency, the weak Afghan government, and all of the other factors leading to the report's conclusion that more forces were needed. General McChrystal worried that if actual numbers of additional troops were part of this report, readers would simply flip to whatever page the specific force request figure was on and ignore all the evidence and analysis pointing toward the logical conclusion that the force was necessary.

My previous research paper, *General McChrystal's Strategic Assessment: Evaluating the Operating Environment in Afghanistan in the Summer of 2009* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2011), is a companion piece to this narrative and chronicles the strategic assessment process that General McChrystal and his staff went through to complete their analysis and

recommendation. The actual assessment, titled *COMISAF's Initial Assessment*, is included in its entirety as the sole annex to that publication. This narrative, *Resourcing General McChrystal's Counterinsurgency Campaign*, chronicles the process that General McChrystal and a small operational planning team (OPT) underwent to develop the actual additional force request that was presented to the president. The strategic assessment team was relatively large, and while certain operational security safeguards were in place, virtually any officer on the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) or USFOR–A staffs who felt that he or she had a vested interest in the assessment could sign on to the team in some form or fashion. The troop-to-task OPT was an entirely different story. General McChrystal was well aware of the political ramifications back in the United States that would likely result from any leaked force request figure, so this OPT was very restricted in composition. For example, as the historian, I often attended the various strategic assessment working groups and main sessions, taking notes for the official history as well as for the rest of the USFOR–A staff located on a separate installation about a mile down the road from ISAF headquarters. However, I was not privy to the troop-to-task OPT, which was somewhat cloaked in secrecy even among the headquarters staff, until after the request was turned in and decided upon by President Obama. Thus, much of my information for writing *General McChrystal's Strategic Assessment* was derived not only from many interviews but also from my own personal observations and notes. However, with the current narrative, nearly all of my information was obtained from other primary sources involved with the troop-to-task OPT and not my own personal involvement.

More than three years have passed since the events chronicled in this narrative occurred, and this is beneficial for a couple of reasons. First, all of the approximately 30,000 additional forces that President Obama ordered to Afghanistan in December 2009 arrived, deployed, and have been employed in their operational missions. Thus, no important operational security information of value to insurgents in Afghanistan can be obtained through the release of this publication. Secondly, many of the emotions surrounding not only the controversial issue of whether or not additional forces should have been sent to Afghanistan but also the controversy over the dismissal of General McChrystal for perceived inappropriately disrespectful comments by the general and members of his staff have faded over time. As a result, I hope this narrative can be taken strictly as it is intended, as a research tool for those who are looking for historical examples of a combat commander and his planning staff having to determine force requirements to properly resource a COIN campaign while fighting in a complex, harsh operating environment.

We now know that General McChrystal's focused protect-to-population COIN strategy, along with the tens of thousands of US forces that he ultimately received to fight alongside the other coalition and Afghan troops, were indeed enough to stop the Taliban momentum and, in fact, to regain the initiative in favor of the coalition. Unfortunately, even two years later, we do not yet know whether US and coalition efforts to defeat the insurgency and bring stability and a self-sustaining capability to Afghanistan will ultimately succeed. It is relatively clear, however, that had the United States not "doubled down" back in 2009 and better resourced its COIN campaign strategy, the situation in Afghanistan likely would be far worse today than it currently is. As a result, I see 2009 as the year that the Taliban insurgency peaked and the initiative shifted back to the coalition forces and the Afghan government. The leadership of General McChrystal and the efforts of his troop-to-task OPT were vital factors in that decisive 2009 momentum shift. After all of the blood and resources that the United States have invested, I am hopeful that the successes of the last two years will continue and will ultimately result in the permanent defeat of the Taliban.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all of the participants whom I interviewed for this project for candidly sharing their experiences with me and allowing me to use some of their quotes in this paper. I would particularly like to single out Gen Stanley McChrystal for his leadership of the International Security Assistance Force during this tumultuous period and for allowing the use of parts of my interview with him in this narrative. US Army colonel Derek Miller and US Marine colonel James McGrath were vital contributors to both the troop-to-task effort in Afghanistan and to the telling of this story through their participation in my research process. Lt Col Patrick Howell provided numerous detailed notes from his planning duties that were invaluable to reassembling the troop-to-task operational planning team timeline and analysis. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Daniel Mortensen for providing an initial edit of this narrative and also the rest of the Air Force Research Institute's team of editors and staff who made the publishing of this document possible.

Introduction

Gen Stanley McChrystal arrived in Afghanistan on 15 June 2009, assuming command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a NATO-led organization struggling to prevent a reinvigorated Taliban from extending their areas of insurgent control throughout the country. Secretary of Defense (SecDef) Robert Gates had removed the previous ISAF commander, Gen David McKiernan, as the seriousness of the situation on the ground in Afghanistan became apparent to US leadership at a time when Pres. Barack Obama had made Afghanistan his primary foreign policy focus. With a sense of urgency driving him, General McChrystal hit the ground in Kabul with a direct verbal tasking from Secretary Gates to do an initial assessment of the overall situation in Afghanistan. The defense secretary told General McChrystal, "Go take 60 days, do an assessment, and tell me what you need."[1] The implication of this order was that if General McChrystal thought more forces were necessary, this was his chance to ask for them. However, Secretary Gates's verbal tasking occurred in Washington, DC, prior to General McChrystal's assumption of command, and by the time the 60-day assessment was under way in earnest in July, it had become clear to the military leadership at the Pentagon that support for the US mission in Afghanistan was starting to weaken among some politicians and advisors in the executive branch, leaders on Capitol Hill, foreign policy pundits, and ordinary Americans.

Speculation began concerning whether the new US commander in Afghanistan would ask for more Americans to be sent to Afghanistan in the face of rapidly rising US and coalition casualties and rising war costs in the midst of a recession in the United States. It was at this time that General McChrystal was advised to delink any potential request for additional forces from his initial 60-day assessment report. From this point in mid-July until the officially titled *COMISAF's Initial Assessment* was submitted on 30 August, two separate but linked ISAF efforts were occurring simultaneously. One was the larger, all-encompassing *COMISAF's Initial Assessment*, or strategic assessment, as the 60-day assessment was dubbed during this period, and the second was a much smaller, yet equally important so-called troop-to-task analysis to determine the proper amount of forces to battle the Afghan insurgency. The strategic assessment process and the written report that resulted from it are captured in my companion piece, *General McChrystal's Strategic Assessment: Evaluating the Operating Environment in Afghanistan in the Summer of 2009*.[2] The troop-to-task planning effort, with its resultant recommendation for approximately 43,000 additional forces, is presented in this narrative.

The analysis to determine the proper amount of resources required to implement General McChrystal's protect-the-population counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy was cloaked in secrecy to avoid the appearance of the field commander getting out in front of his commander in chief, who in this case had yet to complete a new executive branch strategy review of his own and formally reembrace the overall COIN strategy that he adopted shortly after assuming office. Rising casualties, the recession, and the tainted Afghan presidential election, which sent Hamid Karzai back for a second term under a cloud of suspicion due to alleged corruption and election fraud, were the final contributing factors for President Obama to begin his new strategy review. This review included digesting General McChrystal's 60-day assessment and ultimately the troop-to-task report, titled *Resourcing the ISAF Implementation Strategy*, which recommended that approximately 43,000 additional forces be sent to Afghanistan. But how exactly did General McChrystal arrive at that number? What went into the analysis and planning that led to that conclusion? Was the analysis qualitative? Did it have a quantitative component? The following narrative will answer all of these questions and more, outlining how this remarkably small team of planning experts worked day and night, seven days a week during the historic summer and fall of 2009, ultimately churning out a remarkable piece of analytical work that perfectly framed the options available to General McChrystal and the associated risk of each. In the end, General McChrystal received most of the forces that he asked for, but only time will tell if they have the positive effect that he and his planners forecasted.

The Tasking

The initial tasking to determine how many forces were needed to successfully resource General McChrystal's new COIN strategy came from the SecDef as described in the introduction. Prior to arriving in Afghanistan, General McChrystal was the director of the Joint Staff, working directly for Adm Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (often referred to as simply "the chairman"). Naturally, in this position, General McChrystal received regular briefings on the progress in Afghanistan throughout the year prior to his assumption of command of both ISAF and United States Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR–A) in Kabul on 15 June 2009. Thus, he was familiar with coalition strategy and operations in Afghanistan. Initially, he did not believe that he necessarily needed more forces. The USFOR–A deputy commander and the eventual commander of the ISAF Joint Command (IJC), Army Lt Gen David Rodriguez had worked with General McChrystal at the Pentagon as the senior military assistant to Secretary Gates and also was

skeptical of whether more forces were necessary in Afghanistan. General McChrystal said:

> General Rodriguez and I did not come over here expecting to ask for more forces. Of course we spent so much time together in the Pentagon, talking about it; prepping after the day they directed us to do it. We actually thought we didn't need any more forces. It was only the analysis that pulled us toward that and we were actually a little bit surprised by it. But we talked every day during the process, often one on one. We let the analysis pull us where it did. We made decisions based on that. We didn't just start with a preconceived notion [that more forces were required].[3]

From Secretary Gates's tasking, General McChrystal and his planners went to work. General McChrystal's guidance and tasking to his planning team would shift as he hit the ground and began his initial assessment. This evolving command guidance will be discussed chronologically in follow-on sections of this narrative. In the meantime, who exactly served on this planning team?

The Team

Before describing the rest of the team, it is important to point out that General McChrystal led the troop-to-task planning effort. In a command style similar to that he used during the strategic assessment, he let the planning staff inform him with all of their detailed analysis, but he took ownership of the process at the end. Thus, the resourcing recommendation sent to the SecDef and the president was *his* recommendation, and when presenting it to his superior officers, he did not just brief it, he *owned* it. General McChrystal is an infantryman, first serving in conventional infantry units, then as a Ranger, and finally as a leader in Joint Special Operations Command, where he was responsible for counterterrorism operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq for several years prior to his tour as director of the Joint Staff. This would prove particularly relevant later in both the strategic assessment and the troop-to-task analysis, because typically a counterterrorism-based strategy requires fewer resources than a COIN strategy. Thus, as will be explained with greater detail later, the fact that General McChrystal's strategic assessment called for a full-blown COIN strategy designed to protect the Afghan population centers was telling, and it made the analysis of exactly how many troops would be required to carry out that strategy even more critical.

Lieutenant General Rodriguez was selected by the SecDef and chairman to lead the IJC, the new three-star corps-like headquarters to be placed between ISAF headquarters and the five regional commands (RC). His official title during the IJC standup period, prior to attaining initial operational capability on 12 October, was the deputy commander, USFOR–A. He and General

McChrystal had a close relationship that went back decades, and his perspective influenced many aspects of both the overarching strategic assessment and the smaller, more focused troop-to-task analysis. General McChrystal believed both he and Lieutenant General Rodriguez were sent to Afghanistan together intentionally. He said:

> I've known General Rodriguez for 37 years. We were cadets at West Point together. We were company commanders together next door to each other in the Rangers. My wife is the godmother of one of his kids. We've been best friends for years. We were here in Afghanistan together when he commanded the 82nd and I had some of the SOF forces. We had been at the Pentagon and worked together every day. I believe that the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman picked us together. One, they'd seen us operate. But they also knew the relationship we had. I think that was part of their calculus.[4]

Previously, Lieutenant General Rodriguez spent more than a year as the US Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) commander, when he deployed with his division, the 82nd Airborne, in February 2007. There are many places throughout this narrative where General McChrystal provides input to and decisions for the troop-to-task analysis. His discussions with and advice provided by Lieutenant General Rodriguez influenced virtually all of his input.

General McKiernan asked US Army colonel Derek Miller to serve on the USFOR–A staff. He arrived in May of 2009, ironically just before General McKiernan relinquished command. Colonel Miller was moved to the ISAF CJ35 Branch, current operations plans, and ultimately became the de facto lead for the troop-to-task planning effort. He is a career infantryman who has commanded at both the battalion and brigade levels. His assignment prior to arriving in Afghanistan was as the C3/5/7 director at First Army. Colonel Miller credited Maj Gen Michael Tucker (US Army), who was the dual-hatted operations chief for both ISAF and USFOR–A, for the switch and the chance to be a big part of the new team. Colonel Miller explained, "After the swap [the change between Generals McKiernan and McChrystal], General Tucker approved the move to the CJ35, because he and General McChrystal had a fair amount of overlap, and I continued on in that position."[5] Because there was a gap of a couple of weeks after General McKiernan left and before General McChrystal arrived, Colonel Miller was actually in the CJ35 shop about a week prior to the new commander's arrival. Even though he was requested by General McKiernan, because he was one of the newly arrived US colonels, many at ISAF believed General McChrystal had requested him. Colonel Miller was a graduate of the US Army's School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) at Fort Leavenworth as well as a graduate of the National Security Policy Program (NSPP) at the Army War College, and, in addition to other

assignments, he had served as a headquarters planner twice prior to his arrival at ISAF.

Col James McGrath (US Marine Corps), ISAF's CJ5 Plans Directorate deputy chief, essentially led the strategic assessment's campaign plan working group and the command and control working group. His campaign plan working group was inextricably linked to Colonel Miller and his troop-to-task planning group throughout the process. Colonel McGrath is a career infantryman who also is a plans officer, having graduated from the Marine Corps School of Advanced Warfighting (SAW). He served three tours in Iraq, but this was his first tour in Afghanistan.

Lt Col Patrick Howell (US Army) is a career combat engineer, who also taught international relations at the US Military Academy at West Point. He is also a coded planner, having graduated from SAMS. He arrived in Afghanistan at the very end of July, right as the troop-to-task analysis was beginning.

Maj Nikolai Andresky (US Army) is an armor officer. He graduated from SAMS and worked under Colonel Miller in the CJ35.

Lt Col Roger McDuffie (US Marine Corps) was initially sent from the US Central Command (USCENTCOM) staff to Afghanistan in June to assist with the standup of the IJC but was shifted briefly over to the troop-to-task working group where he provided a theaterwide perspective.

Maj Richard Dembowski was a career infantryman in the US Army who had just finished SAMS and arrived at ISAF on 2 July 2009, right as the troop-to-task assessment was getting under way. He initially was assigned to work on the current operations floor but was pulled upstairs to the CJ35 to assist with the force planning.

Maj William "Chip" Horn started out as an infantry officer, but upon promotion to major, he was branch transferred to force management. His Army force management training was focused on the Army's Title 10 responsibilities of training, manning, and equipping and not the global force management duties, or what he called "campaign and theater design and management," that he did at USFOR–A. He said, "It was a very steep learning curve for me starting the day I arrived in Kabul."[6]

Maj Richard Rumsey (UK Royal Army) was a career signal officer and, hailing from the United Kingdom (UK), the only non-US member of the troop-to-task team. He was a graduate of the British equivalent to SAMS, the Advanced Command and Staff Planning Course. Major Rumsey arrived in early August as the initial product was beginning to form, but he quickly became an integral member of the team, particularly in the refinement and management of the plan as it navigated its way through the decision process.

The troop-to-task analysis benefited from the significant number of trained and experienced planners involved in the process. Colonel Miller, in addition to being a SAMS graduate, had previously been a planner for 3rd Infantry Division and Army Central Command (ARCENT). Colonel McGrath was a SAW graduate and was previously the lead planner for Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa. Lieutenant Colonel Howell, Maj Nikolai Andresky, and Maj Richard Dembowski from the CJ35 were all SAMS graduates, as were others in the CJ5 and on the regional command staffs assisting with this effort. On the subject of having so many advanced planning school graduates involved, Colonel McGrath explained:

> It was absolutely a difference maker. They know how the staff operates. The planners themselves aren't necessarily experts in any one particular area, but they are familiar with all the staff areas and are experts in the planning process and can bring a disparate group of staff together in a cohesive manner to come up with a presentable product. These planners can take a complex problem and simplify it, leverage expertise, and go through the planning process that you can teach, coach and mentor others through. And understand how commanders think.[7]

These "advanced" planners also generally have the incredibly useful skill of planning in environments that contain a high degree of uncertainty. This was particularly relevant with a planning process such as this, where both a campaign plan and a resourcing plan were being developed simultaneously. First, the campaign planning group began planning a strategy without really knowing the total number of coalition forces that it was going to have and without clear initial formal commander's guidance, as General McChrystal was still finalizing his initial battlefield circulation and assessment of the situation. Thus, it was critical to have adaptive advanced planners who could plan even with the lack of initial clarity and other uncertainties. Colonel McGrath, who was leading the new campaign planning effort, described it this way:

> We used the proper process, but we had to condense it to meet our timelines. The commander didn't sit down and give formal guidance. That's normally the first step. The commander is meant to step in at specific times and places and give guidance, but he didn't engage in that manner. He simply didn't have the time. There are set process points where the commander normally steps in to make a decision—*The Mission Analysis Brief*, the COA [course-of-action] development brief, the COA analysis brief—but General McChrystal didn't do all of these steps. In fact, we didn't even get an initial "Commander's Intent." We used the strategic assessment, and as it morphed we had to circle back and make sure our original planning assumptions were still good.[8]

The troop-to-task planning group also dealt with tremendous uncertainty attempting to apply various COIN models, logistical estimates, and various expert and leader judgments as inputs into their analysis. Major Dembowski

said that SAMS had been a good training ground for planning despite the uncertainty, and added, "At SAMS we looked at both operational and strategic level, at the US national level and the international level of policy. So here in Afghanistan, I've actually seen all those things in play."[9]

In addition to the small team of planners just described operating out of ISAF Headquarters, the troop-to-task planners also had the regional commands perform assessments of their areas, and these regional products were the result of the various RC headquarters' planners from a variety of nations. A few other subject matter experts were brought into the group to perform specific functions. The team required these participants to sign nondisclosure statements to protect the integrity of the planning effort.

In August, Col Richard Wiersema (US Army) brought a team from USCENTCOM to help refine the primary planning options. They had to "peel back the onion" and see exactly who, what, where, and how potential new forces requested would logistically deploy from a variety of locations and organizations outside of Afghanistan into the country for employment. Until this point, the planning was kept almost entirely close-hold and within a small group of planners.

Thus, it was with this relatively small but highly competent planning team that General McChrystal was able to come up with his resource recommendation to the SecDef and President Obama. But how did General McChrystal and his team do it? Their story follows.

The Strategic Assessment Begins

The strategic assessment began amid the tumultuous first few days of General McChrystal's arrival and assumption of command of ISAF and USFOR–A in June 2009. Starting a project of this magnitude, while at the same time getting familiar with his new staff and his command environment, was a huge undertaking for the new commander. Among the multitude of important tasks General McChrystal was performing in those early days was meeting with all the key Afghan and US government players in Kabul. These included Afghan president Hamid Karzai and members of his cabinet, along with US ambassador Karl Eikenberry and key embassy staff. He also had to visit all of the regional commands and meet the RC commanders. Additionally, he had to get numerous separate briefings from the different ISAF and USFOR–A staff sections to become as familiar as possible, as rapidly as he could, with all aspects of his new dual-hatted command. As a result of this "fire hose" of critical engagement and in-depth theater indoctrination, General McChrystal simply did not have the time to get into the early mechanical details of the

strategic assessment. Thus, early on he was forced to provide just the basic strategic guidance to his key staff and give them room to accomplish the task.

In the first week of the assessment, there was no separate analysis or working group to work the resource requirement. At this point, most of the focus of the CJ35 and CJ5 shop was on the current plan, Operation Tolo (OP TOLO), Revision 3. General McChrystal initially wanted a thorough review of the current plan, and as a part of that review, he asked if the team had enough resources for the current plan. Nearly everyone involved saw problems with the current plan. Colonel McGrath said, "The plan had significant issues. It was security, development, governance surrounded by a strategic communications plan. What made it a bit incoherent was that it lacked an operational design. So we had an idea of which direction we were supposed to go, but we didn't have a plan or a path on how to get there."[10]

Colonel Miller also saw difficulties with the old plan, believing it to be too broad with too many requirements and no coherent priorities. He stated, "It was sort of all over the map. It had all of these requirements, ranging from actually securing the ring road and the critical districts that went around there [the ring road route] and border and counternarcotics. It covered all of those things, but it didn't really loop it all together. It didn't tell you how to do it."[11]

To get a second opinion, Colonel Miller asked his new SAMS planner, Lieutenant Colonel Howell, to review OP TOLO and provide him feedback. Colonel Miller did not tell Lieutenant Colonel Howell of his own assessment so as not to taint Howell's opinion. After reviewing the plan, Lieutenant Colonel Howell remarked, "If you listed out all the things in the plan called 'priorities,' there were about 30 or 40. It was a lot of ideas but no synchronization . . . just ideas on a map. If we had sufficient forces, we could do them all, but there was no prioritization. It was a really good set of ideas, but because they were all 'important,' none of them were."[12]

The director of communications, Rear Adm Gregory Smith, when taking part in a briefing on the plan with General McChrystal and the rest of the staff, immediately saw a problem with "Strategic Communications" being its own line of operation. He said, "That's not a line of operation. It's just flat not."[13] And that began the reexamination of ISAF's strategic communications process with General McChrystal's new team. Rear Admiral Smith then explained that strategic communications is not a separate group of people, or a separate headquarters function but instead a part of all of the different staff functions and lines of operation. As he explained all of this, heads began nodding in agreement around the room, even among the holdovers from General McKiernan's team. Afterwards, some of them said, "Yes sir, we had the same

debate as we developed this thing, but your predecessor felt that to not emphasize this thing—StratCom—meant that it wasn't going to have value."[14]

Despite all of its problems, OP TOLO did lay out a COIN strategy similar to the one General McChrystal adopted in the new plan. Despite his earlier comments critiquing the plan, Colonel Miller added, "I think there was a misconception from a lot of people at the time that OP TOLO was out to lunch. OP TOLO was not out to lunch. It had many of the same precepts [as General McChrystal's later plan]. It was grounded in COIN Doctrine, but it was dysfunctional because of the synchronization aspect of it."[15]

Perhaps the best description of the differences in the COIN principles in General McKiernan's plan and the direction that General McChrystal wanted to proceed came from the new commander himself. General McChrystal noted that

> General McKiernan absolutely did have the thrust in his plan to go at a more population-centric counterinsurgency effort . . . absolutely. So the idea that we were coming at it from a completely different direction would be incorrect. However, I wanted to put a different focus priority-wise on where we were going. Also, in my assessment, although the plan [OP TOLO] said "counterinsurgency," the force didn't believe it yet. And so, [because of the nature of] the command change, [it] allowed me to have everybody's attention. So at that point, I tried to use that to make the point, "We are dead serious! This is how we're operating now." So it, at the end of the day, the reality was [that] it was a huge shift in where we were operating and in how we were operating [rather than] the writing [that was] in the plan.[16]

By the first week of July, General McChrystal began to come to the conclusion that as written, OP TOLO would need far more resources to begin to be effective, and that the plan itself was just not good enough to go forward. Colonel McGrath noticed the shift beginning right before 4 July, talking about a CJ5 campaign plan review where General McChrystal received several briefs on the current campaign plan and the forces likely required to execute it: "We threw that up on a bunch of slides and said 'this is the problem,' and that added into what Jules had given him separately in the office [United Kingdom Royal Air Force Group Captain Jules Eaton, who was one of the original planners for OP TOLO]. It was enough for him to say, 'We're probably going to need a new plan.'"[17]

General McChrystal's battlefield circulation, spin-up briefings, early feedback from strategic assessment analysis, and the counsel of his planning staff all contributed to his conclusions about OP TOLO. The formal deathblow came at the end of a CJ35 troop-to-task back-brief to General McChrystal on 8 July that included participation from all the RCs. General McChrystal came to two conclusions. First, OP TOLO was not good. It was too broad, without

focus, causing US forces to lose everywhere. And second, ISAF did not have the resources to execute the current plan.[18] From this conclusion, General McChrystal tasked Colonel McGrath to essentially begin a new campaign plan. He told Colonel McGrath to "find the places we need to get it right, and then expand, versus doing poorly everywhere. Start with security, and then incorporate governance and development."[19] However, General McChrystal also told the group that the new strategy would be useless without a rigorous analysis of what ISAF needed in the way of resources. He wanted to have "short-term demonstrable progress in 12 months and long-term decisive indication of clear positive momentum."[20] He followed up this guidance with specific resource evaluation guidance to the CJ35 staff, with input from the RCs. He wanted them to specifically analyze three resource levels to meet this intent:

1. Enough forces to achieve success in a rapid way (less than 12 months) for all RCs
2. Enough forces to achieve slow progress overall with rapid success in key spots
3. Enough forces to maintain the status quo but not lose[21]

General McChrystal finished by stating that "if I go forward for additional forces, it must be Hemingway" and that he would need to "show the math" because the narrative would be very important for both Congress and the troops.[22] At this point, roughly two weeks into the strategic assessment, General McChrystal had unofficially signaled the beginning of the new campaign planning process and the associated troop-to-task analysis.

The Troop-to-Task Begins

As the CJ35 staff began the hard task of determining the number of troops needed for the three questions General McChrystal put forth, most participants began to sense that even if the amount was yet to be determined, some new forces would likely be necessary. The strategic assessment, although still ongoing, was pointing in that direction, and the RC SOUTH commander and his staff were adamant that they did not have enough forces. It was clear that coalition and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) forces were losing in the south and a revised strategy might help. However, there just were not enough forces to go around. Although at the beginning of the process Colonel Miller was unsure about the need for more forces, by the middle of July he had concluded that more troops were required to do the job, saying,

> I realized that there was no way we could do everything that he [the commander] asked us to do. And, even if we streamlined the tasks, they just didn't have the force to do population-centric COIN. The population centers that we were going to protect were too big. The other thing is that we were out in the hinterlands. In RC EAST, they [US forces] were up in valleys and places [other than population centers]. . . . We knew that we were going to have to make some hard decisions about whether we really needed our guys up there.[23]

Colonel Miller was referring to the fact that even though OP TOLO had recently adopted a COIN protect-the-population focus, many coalition forces were still holding remote positions in areas near the Pakistan border where they had been set up under the Taliban interdiction strategies of previous Afghanistan commands. However, Colonel Miller realized that even if you realigned these troops to population centers, they still would not be enough. He said,

> Kandahar City is about 480,000, and when you put the other districts that touch it to form the greater urban sprawl, it is 800,000 to a million people. We didn't even come close to have what we needed for Kandahar City. It wasn't as bad in Helmand because we had Task Force Helmand with the Brits and the Marines at Leatherneck. But even there we did not really have what we needed. We were too spread out and our forces were completely fixed. We could not take and control any additional population centers.[24]

Colonel Miller knew that COIN strategy required a "clear, hold, build" methodology. That is, forces go into an insurgent-dominated population center and clear out the enemy. This step is designed to establish security and separate the insurgents from the population. Establishing security is the enabling task to be able to work on governance and development. After establishing security, coalition forces cannot simply leave the area; otherwise, the insurgents will return. Thus, the need to stay and "hold" the key terrain is paramount. Finally, improving economic development and governance will help build the support of the people. Applied to RC SOUTH, the new forces that had arrived by the summer of 2009, specifically a Marine expeditionary force (MEF) and a Stryker brigade, along with other forces, could not simply bounce around playing "whack a mole" with Taliban forces as the insurgents fled from one place to another. In this case, if coalition forces failed to hold previously cleared areas, Taliban forces would retake the areas with devastating consequences for any of the locals who had cooperated with coalition forces. Thus, coalition forces already in the south were indeed "fixed" in the areas they had previously cleared, and if additional areas were to be cleared and held, more forces were necessary. So even if one were to put any future operation to clear Kandahar aside, Colonel Miller recognized intuitively that another brigade was necessary just for the neighboring Helmand Province

alone. He said, "The fact that we had to stay and hold areas in Helmand drove us to recognize that we had to have another brigade there to be able to do the central Helmand area, to reinforce other areas, to get to the point where we really thought we'd have enough guys to get after the population centers. We needed it to just simply have enough security forces to partner with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to run patrols. It's literally like just having enough police on the street corners."[25]

Colonel McGrath was also unconvinced that they needed more forces when the process began, but he too began to realize during the middle of July that an increase was needed. He said, "As we got more into it, into our planning, and started to crack the nut on this, where we had to apply our resources and where we really had to develop our population centers and understand where the threat and density centers were, [we realized] our force ratios weren't there."[26]

As most of the key players involved began to intuitively and instinctively recognize that more forces were likely needed, General McChrystal had a "round table" meeting with his key troop-to-task and campaign planning staffs on 14 July. Nearly a week had passed since he had provided the guidance to look at the three force options that would lead to rapid success, slow progress, or maintain the status quo. He had thought it over and was ready to provide refined guidance. Lieutenant Colonel Howell described his commander's thought process this way: "I saw those [the initial three force option conditions] as end states. And then over the following six days he [General McChrystal] was brainstorming, "OK, I see some 'means' that can line up against those end states." Certain resource packages might be tied in more with one of these end states. I think in his brainstorm fashion he thought, 'We might look at some of these specific force packages.'"[27]

General McChrystal had indeed come up with more clarified guidance. He wanted Colonel Miller and his team to analyze five specific force package options and show the results on a map with statistics to support their conclusions.[28] The new force package options were:

1. Current force structure with no new forces or change in strategy (baseline),
2. Current force structure with new strategy included,
3. Current force structure with new strategy and "enabling" forces included,
4. Current force with new strategy, enablers, plus minimal brigade combat teams (BCT), and
5. New strategy with enablers and "fully resourced" force structure.[29]

At this point, Colonel Miller formed a slightly larger operational planning team (OPT) and named Lieutenant Colonel Howell as its leader. The small team included Major Andresky, who was the lead for the first OP TOLO troop-to-task analysis question, and Major Dembowski, who was pulled up from the current operations team in the Combined Joint Operations Center (CJOC). The small team, which now was comprised predominantly of SAMS planners, also pulled in select planners from the other staff sections, USFOR–A, and the RCs when needed.

Operational Security Becomes Paramount

As the troop-to-task OPT began to analyze the five new force package options, everyone paying attention began to feel an undercurrent of shifting public opinion back in the United States. Rising US and coalition casualties, doubts about President Karzai's commitment to real reforms, and general war fatigue that so often sets in when democratic nations are in long, drawn-out conflicts all contributed to feeding a rising chorus of discontent. Additionally, the rising war costs during a recession made many opinion makers wonder how long and how many more billions of dollars would be spent before Afghanistan was stabilized or conjecture if it ever *could* be stabilized. This growing pressure was even bubbling up in the executive branch, with Vice Pres. Joe Biden favoring a more limited counterterrorism option, as did some leaders on Capitol Hill.

After his inauguration, President Obama had completed a strategy review on Afghanistan that had already endorsed a COIN strategy for Afghanistan over a stricter counterterrorism approach and had even ordered an additional 21,000 forces in February 2009 to go into RC SOUTH. By mid-July, as the troop-to-task OPT began its work in earnest, although President Obama had not publicly backed off his previously decided COIN strategy, privately there was growing concern in military circles related to Afghanistan that he was reconsidering it. The SecDef, the chairman, and General McChrystal were aware of the growing pressure on the president to reconsider his COIN strategy and sensed his growing unease with the situation in Afghanistan. Given these myriad factors, there was intense pressure to keep all planning on potential force increase options very close-hold. General McChrystal did not want any information leaked to the press that might indicate that he was unilaterally making plans to increase the force size in Afghanistan prior to a decision to do so by his commander in chief. Moreover, General McChrystal had not yet made a decision himself on which of the five options he would recommend

to the SecDef and president, notwithstanding his earlier indications that more forces would likely be needed.

As the CJ35, Colonel Miller led efforts to keep the analysis as tight as he could. He said:

> We kept it very, very close-hold, and so when you talk about that group that was meeting in the COM's office [General McChrystal's office], for us and our immediate functional areas and that was it. The strategic assessment was not done. He [General McChrystal] continually said, "We cannot get ahead of the president. We cannot get ahead of the CENTCOM Commander." We were very straight with everybody that this was close-hold. Many of the people that we brought in here that were not part [of] the initial team . . . we had them sign nondisclosure statements.[30]

In fact, General McChrystal frequently began discussion in larger rooms with something along the lines of, "If anyone here cannot be a professional and thinks they might 'leak' things out of this discussion, get out now!"[31]

The secrecy came with risk, however, as the complexity of deploying large numbers of forces from the United States to Afghanistan was tremendous. Planners and force-flow models and modelers from the Joint Staff, the service staffs, USCENTCOM, and US Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) are normally required to accurately assess which units are actually able to deploy, when they could deploy, and how fast they could flow into theater. Although the small OPT had Lieutenant Colonel McDuffie from the USCENTCOM staff in Kabul planning with it for part of the analysis, he was not allowed to divulge any of the planning details back to others at USCENTCOM. This was very frustrating to Lieutenant Colonel McDuffie, who said:

> I had been involved in the previous CENTCOM OPT back in 2008 that planned the 2008-2009 Afghanistan force uplift for almost 30,000 troops, doubling our troop numbers in Afghanistan at the time. I knew how important it was to start feeding information to all those other commands and agencies responsible for deploying large groups of personnel and equipment involved in the planning process. I would be asked specific questions during this new OPT that only subject matter experts from other organizations could answer, but because I could not share information I was forced to make a best guess from what I saw [in] the previous year's planning efforts.[32]

For the rest of summer and into the fall, USCENTCOM planners were pushing to have the OPT opened up and share the information with the wider military community. However, General McChrystal and his staff kept it close-hold. Finally, as will be explained later in this narrative, the force flow information was released in October, and a quickly assembled, large, one-time planning conference was conducted in late October, after General McChrystal submitted his final *Resourcing the ISAF Strategy*, which USCENTCOM, the

Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), and the Pentagon were analyzing.

Prior to the strategy's release to the wider audience, General McChrystal had made a cost-benefit decision that the political risk of the troop-to-task OPT leaking to the press was not worth the added benefit that widening the planning effort to stateside subject matter experts would have brought. He was willing to accept the estimates from his OPT for the types of forces he might receive and how quickly they could close into their potential fighting areas in Afghanistan. Concerns for the security of the OPT and its results would only heighten later in the process after an unknown source leaked the strategic assessment to the *Washington Post*'s Bob Woodward on 20 September, much to the chagrin of President Obama. Furthermore, on 1 October 2009, one week after the troop-to-task results were briefed to US and NATO military leadership, and 10 days after Woodward published parts of the strategic assessment, General McChrystal unintentionally fanned the flames of controversy when he spoke at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London. While answering a question following his prepared remarks about whether a counterterrorism strategy advocated by the vice president would work, and if he could support it, he said, "The short answer is: No." General McChrystal added that "you have to navigate from where you are, not from where you wish to be. A strategy that does not leave Afghanistan in a stable position is probably a short-sighted strategy."[33] At this point, President Obama ordered General McChrystal to fly directly from the United Kingdom (UK) to Denmark to meet with him, and the two discussed, among other things, the need to not appear to be advocating a force increase while the president was in the process of a reevaluating his Afghanistan strategy. The president also discussed the issue with Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen. This led to further security measures regarding the submission of the written report containing General McChrystal's recommended resourcing option for Afghanistan. These security measures will be discussed later in this narrative.

Back in mid-July, the early indications of the political considerations involving a potential recommendation for more resources led Admiral Mullen to advise General McChrystal to officially separate the troop-to-task effort from the rest of the strategic assessment. General McChrystal agreed with the decision. He later added, "So what started as a straightforward assessment was going to include whatever we thought for resources became a politically charged thing."[34] Admiral Mullen and General McChrystal did not want commentators or US government stakeholders simply flipping through the pages until they got to the resourcing numbers and skipping over all of the strategy analysis that was involved dissecting the complex operational environment

that was Afghanistan. By pushing the troop-to-task analysis to a separate study immediately following the strategic assessment, he basically forced all of those involved to actually digest the analysis for a while before seeing any troop increase options.

The Parallel Planning Effort

This point forward marked an unusual period where the key ISAF planners were performing two interrelated but separate planning efforts in parallel fashion. First, Colonel McGrath and his CJ5 team were working on a new population-centric campaign. At the same time, Colonel Miller and his CJ35 troop-to-task OPT were attempting to figure out how many forces were required to execute the campaign plan that was not yet completed. As Colonel McGrath put it, "We were running both efforts simultaneously, with the troop-to-task actually preceding the full development of the plan. It was the cart before the horse."[35]

Normally, a joint staff has to design a campaign and then think about how it will resource it. In this case, however, Colonel Miller and his troop-to-task OPT already knew some things about the campaign plan even before Colonel McGrath and his team had developed it. And, in fact, the two sections really were working in tandem. The CJ5 and CJ35 held combined planning groups to discuss and define what population-centric COIN was all about. Both sections reviewed the idea of building force ratios, creating security, resourcing with civilians, and other programs that would allow security bubbles to expand. They were putting together the mechanical ideas of how to prosecute what General McChrystal wanted—ideas that would later be rolled into the campaign plan. This allowed the team to understand and model the mechanical parts of the campaign and plan the resourcing around those, while the campaign plan would put these blocks together and reprioritize them. The modeling even included the US government civilian uplift and what impact it might make in governance and development based on the numbers of other types of resources that were put into the districts. They already knew that General McChrystal wanted a protect-the-population COIN strategy, and although they did not know all of the operational details that the campaign planning effort would later divulge, they did have plenty of historical and doctrinal resources to apply toward the Afghanistan-specific environment and begin the troop-to-task analysis. As daily progress was made within each of the two planning teams, Colonels Miller and McGrath would have to come together and compare notes. Colonel McGrath explained, "We just kept bouncing off each other and populating this thing. I kept him [Col Miller] informed on

where I was going, he kept me informed on where he was going. He had been a planner for several years before me and he'd come in my sessions and help me, and I'd go into his sessions and help. It was this constant crossing of the two work streams that kept us synchronized."[36]

Colonels McGrath and Miller spent so much time together during this period it became a bit of a running joke with the staff that "McGrath and Miller . . . if you found one, you found the other."[37] The two would often even eat meals together and compare progress with one another. Also, many of their visits to General McChrystal's office were done together. If one could not make a particular office call, General McChrystal just expected whichever one was present to disseminate the latest guidance to the other. The fact that General McChrystal had an open-door leadership style was extremely beneficial to the process. Colonel McGrath stated, "He is a very open, approachable boss and his tolerance level really helped. He knows that what you are going to be presenting to him early in the process is going to be pretty dirty. . . a lot of mud. . . very murky. He's going to use that experience to help you through that particular rough spot or give you some guidance. He's used to running flat and fast and he's used to dealing with things that have a degree of ambiguity [and that] helps."[38]

Eventually, once the results of the troop-to-task analysis were complete and briefed up the chain and President Obama approved a modified but smaller number, these details were folded back into the campaign plan to complete the process.

Examining Both Qualitative and Quantitative Measures

After General McChrystal's 14 July instructions to look at the five separate force package options, Colonel Miller immediately organized a week-long special planning session and mini-OPT within the larger troop-to-task OPT, which included the CJ35 planners and representatives from the RCs, USFOR–A, and other various ISAF staff sections. These sessions met from 16–20 July. To prepare for the planning session, the CJ35 SAMS planners went to work furiously studying US COIN doctrine and other literature on counterinsurgency. The primary COIN doctrine is US Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24, which had become the de facto COIN "Bible" following its publication and subsequent successful implementation in Iraq. Planners used other literature including John J. McGrath, "Boots on the Ground: Troop Density in Contingency Operations," and studies from RAND, including systems analysis research by mathematician James Quinlivan.[39] Among other insights garnered from FM 3-24, one of its recommendations was a historical-based ratio of 20–25 security

forces per 1,000 civilians in a given operation. Up to this point, the OPT employed the ratio 20 per 1,000 as a general figure for planning. Later, as their analysis continued, they used a variable force ratio breakdown based on levels of the insurgency drawn from Quinlivan's work as shown below:

Level of Insurgency	Security Forces per 1,000 Population
1. High Intensity	25 per 1,000
2. Regular Intensity	20 per 1,000
3. Low Intensity	10 per 1,000
4. Minimal Intensity	5 per 1,000[40]

The planners from the RCs utilized a more qualitative approach, relying on their experience and professional military judgment with the respective regions where they operated to analyze their requirements. General McChrystal and Lieutenant General Rodriguez provided a senior qualitative approach based on their prior experience and their recent operational education provided by their staff interaction and the various battlefield circulation visits they were conducting throughout Afghanistan. Thus, within the troop-to-task OPT, there began two parallel but equally important planning tracks: a quantitative approach and a qualitative approach. Each approach was interrelated. The chances of success and risk incurred with each of the five force options based on the quantitative analysis would have to pass General McChrystal's "gut feel" based on his own qualitative research. Conversely, quantitative data would have to reinforce any decisions made based on the RC input and General McChrystal's qualitative analysis because, as he had said earlier, the math needs to be shown to properly argue the case back up the chain of command.

The quantitative analysis planners made four key assumptions as they began their planning.

1. In areas properly resourced with a full COIN ratio, security would develop over time. Additionally, in these properly resourced areas, commanders would conduct COIN correctly.

This assumption was based on Quinlivan's assertion that resourcing COIN properly is not a strategy, but successful strategies are properly resourced. The OPT would not try to model exactly "how" various commanders would fight their COIN forces but just assume that they would properly employ them.

2. Nothing ensures success.

There were no guarantees that even a properly resourced COIN campaign would succeed. The assumption here was that a fully resourced campaign could only be *likely* to succeed and still carried some risk, albeit low. In the case of Afghanistan, a properly resourced COIN campaign was initially determined to be 20 counterinsurgent forces per 1,000 civilians or approximately 480,000 total ISAF and ANSF forces.

3. Full COIN resourcing would be impossible within a one-year time frame.

Given there were only approximately 200,000 ISAF and ANSF COIN forces in Afghanistan in the summer of 2009, and assuming 480,000 total forces were required for full resourcing, it was physically impossible for ISAF to deploy or grow 280,000 forces within the next year. For that reason, all courses of action carried some level of "underresourced" risk. The OPT would need to determine levels of risk associated with various force levels.

4. The necessary COIN ratios varied by Afghan district.

Since not every district had the same intensity of insurgent activity or was of equal importance to the overall campaign, many districts could be resourced at lower levels than the "low-risk" level of 20 per 1,000.[41]

The 480,000 total forces that defined the low-risk option in the first assumption were based on an Afghan population level of 24 million. A variety of different sources placed Afghanistan's population at anywhere from 24–33 million. The troop-to-task OPT used Central Statistics Organization, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Estimated Population of Afghanistan, 2009-2010." Colonel Miller favored this source for a number of reasons. He explained, "We wanted to use the 24 [million] because it was lower [than other estimates] and somewhere down the line someone might come back and say, 'Well, you used 28 million just to get more forces.' It came from Afghanistan, and of course, working with them, partnering with them was another reason it was good. It was the most detailed. They actually gave us numbers and land mass for every district."[42]

In theory, a fully resourced strategy of 480,000 counterinsurgents was a great low-risk option to place at one end of the force option scale, but there was a problem with it. On one hand, it essentially showed leadership that, in a perfect world, this was the minimum amount of troops the coalition and ANSF could bring to the fight and still keep the risk minimal. However, Afghanistan is a logistically constrained, austere environment that simply

cannot instantly receive and sustain 280,000 additional forces. So the OPT realized that since General McChrystal had to show positive results within 12 to 18 months, they needed a realistic "upper end" force-increase figure defined as their "fully resourced" option. To determine this number, they needed some information. First, how many brigades feasibly could be sent to Afghanistan and be ready to fight in 12 to 18 months? Additionally, how many new ANSF forces could be recruited, trained, and combat ready in that time? To answer these questions, the team went to two local sources down the road in Kabul, the Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC–A) and USFOR–A. CSTC–A was responsible for recruiting and training the Afghan National Police (ANP), the Afghan National Army (ANA), and other, smaller ANSF forces. USFOR–A was responsible for the Title 10 functions of US forces in Afghanistan and was just finishing the herculean tasks of building infrastructure and organizing the deployment of the 21,000 additional forces that President Obama had ordered previously for Afghanistan in February 2009.

Lt Col John Stroud-Terp (UK Royal Army) from CSTC–A provided information about the projected growth of the ANSF, indicating that the ANSF would grow by approximately 30,000 within 12 to 15 months and, more importantly, that the ANSF was projected to grow to approximately 400,000 by 2014. When planners combined this force with the current ISAF force level, it added up to the recommended 480,000 counterinsurgents that Afghanistan would ultimately need to have a properly resourced force to fight the Taliban. The troop-to-task OPT also considered that the Afghan population would grow in the five-year period from the beginning of 2009 and end of 2013, and they actually applied a growth rate to the 24 million figure and came up with a 2013 figure of 26.5 million. Thus, using a 20 per 1,000 ratio, the actual final number of COIN forces required would be approximately 530,000. Therefore, between the time that the troop-to-task was being conducted, the summer of 2009, and 2014, when there would be enough total forces without any additional coalition troops, General McChrystal would have to determine the best resourcing solution to recommend to US and NATO leadership to bridge the five-year gap as the ANSF slowly expanded to 400,000 by 2014, and ultimately to 530,000, in order to allow coalition forces to redeploy.

The USFOR–A planners assisted in determining how fast US forces could realistically flow into theater and be absorbed, regardless of how many new forces were ultimately requested. After careful analysis, it was estimated that about one combat brigade could deploy every three months. Thus, in 12 months, about four new brigades could be deployed—five brigades in 15 months. If one remembered the 12 to 18 months timetable for measurable progress, these figures were extremely significant. Thus, irrespective of how

many additional brigades might be desired to properly resource the Afghan counterinsurgency fight, only four or five brigades could arrive in time to have any significant impact in the time required. When combined with other required support forces, this was approximately 35,000 to 40,000 troops.

The planners now had to define overall risk and apply it to the initial three end-states that General McChrystal had defined. Just having a force big enough to hold on, was considered "very high risk." To have success in one to two key areas and just hold on elsewhere was considered "high risk." General McChrystal's third end-state had been defined as "rapid success across the country," but based on the information provided by USFOR–A, this end-state was mitigated by the fact that only four brigades could be deployed in time to contribute towards "rapid" success as defined by a 12 to 18 month timeline. This four-brigade option was defined as "medium risk." This was a significant finding because, regardless of the resourcing decision by US and NATO leadership, the lowest level of risk that could be achieved in the short-term in the Afghan COIN campaign was considered medium; *there were no initial low-risk solutions*.

The other piece that Major Horn and USFOR–A brought to the OPT was the support unit requirement necessary to close new combat forces into Afghanistan. There were few to no facilities in most of the areas to which any new US forces would likely deploy, and infrastructure does not just appear out of thin air. Troops would have to build forward operating bases (FOB) and combat outposts (COP), add transportation assets, and deploy more force protection units to protect the roads, FOBs, COPs, and the engineers working on them. These forces were known as "enablers" in the USFOR–A planning vernacular. Construction engineers were a big part of these enablers. Major Horn and the USFOR–A staff determined that more than 4,000 enablers would be required in order to prepare for the deployment of four brigades over the next 12 months. There was also the issue of equipping new forces with required items such as mine-resistant ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicles, which would also have to be shipped into Afghanistan from either the United States or Iraq. This was another difficult logistical problem. The planners had to make educated guesses regarding the speed with which equipment such as the MRAPs could close into Afghanistan. In addition, it was already determined that even if more combat brigades were not brought in, a new training brigade to assist developing and growing the ANSF was required, as well as another aviation brigade to assist with battlefield mobility and medical evacuation (MEDEVAC). These two brigades would be a total of 6,000-plus additional soldiers, and when added to the other enablers totaled roughly 11,000. However many combat brigades the OPT recommended for different force

options, these 11,000 enablers would need to be added to get a total force package figure.

Major Horn wanted to get the enabler piece as accurate as possible, because the Request for Forces (RFF) 920 and 937, which had been approved under General McKiernan's tenure, had not adequately accounted for all of the enablers. As a result, USFOR–A staff had to request almost 50 additional small RFFs to ask for enabling forces in addition to RFF 920 and 937. Major Horn stated, "This resulted in generating thousands of passenger-equivalent validated requirements over and above what we had 'cap' space for. The 'cap' during this period was 68,000 US forces."[43] Having dealt with the pain of this previous lack of enabler detail, Major Horn did not want the same thing to happen this time. Although he understood the reasons for General McChrystal's need for close-hold secrecy, he knew there would be no way to get the necessary enabler detail until the effort was eventually widened to a larger audience that included USCENTCOM, USCENTCOM's components, USTRANSCOM, and other units and agencies.

One final area in which both the quantitative and qualitative approaches were involved was the ranking of Afghan districts in priority order in two separate categories. First, the team ranked each of the districts according to their level of importance relative to the overall COIN campaign. Second, they ranked each of the districts according to the level of the threat from insurgency within that district. On the qualitative side, the RC planners made assessments in these two areas, and on the quantitative side, the CJ2 Intelligence Directorate did the same. Interestingly, the two assessments, done independently of each other, were remarkably similar. In the 10 percent of districts where there was disagreement, the CJ35 troop-to-task OPT planners discussed the differences with the two groups and made the final call on the rankings. These rankings were the key factors used to perform the quantitative analysis described in the next section.

The Quantitative Analysis

The troop-to-task OPT used several quantitative methods to analyze the resource requirements of COIN operations in Afghanistan. They used military doctrine, force-ratio risk modeling, and complex system modeling. As mentioned previously, the primary doctrinal source was FM 3-24, which is where they found their force ratio options, for example the 20 to 25 troops per 1,000 population figure for COIN operations. FM 3-24 was produced under the guidance of then–US Army Combined Arms Center commander Lt Gen David Petraeus, along with Marine Corps doctrine leadership, and was

successfully modeled as part of the "surge" strategy that turned the tide in favor of the coalition in Iraq. As earlier noted, the OPT also looked at a variety of other COIN literature for analytical background and guidance to shape their quantitative analysis.

Force-Ratio Risk Modeling

In addition to their other literature resources, air defense doctrine was another key doctrinal area that pointed the OPT toward risk assessment methodology. Colonel Miller described the OPT's realization of this: "[We asked] 'What can you do . . . if you can't protect everything, what can you afford to lose?' It struck us that US Air Defense Doctrine had used several terms like 'vulnerability of different sites' and the 'recuperability of sites' and we said, 'That's sort of the same thing. If you can't protect everything, you have to protect the most important things.'"[44]

This air defense methodology also dealt with prioritizing the friendly high-value targets or assets that need defending. It described the sorts of things that would have the worst impact on a campaign if they were lost. The team then realized that this was a solid concept to apply to COIN operations in Afghanistan. It was not perfect, and it did not adequately fit the complex insurgent threats that ISAF faced. However, it led them to the risk methodology described earlier when the planners from ISAF and the RCs ranked each district in terms of importance and level of insurgency. Even after tapping the air defense methodology, the OPT planners were still having trouble translating that to a workable model for Afghanistan analysis. Lieutenant Colonel McDuffie said, "Colonel Miller described his air defense analogy concept to us and wanted us to try to graphically depict the concept he was describing. After several failed attempts to artistically provide him a graphic model, it occurred to me that the Operational Risk Management [ORM] matrixes that we use in Marine aviation and the Joint Operational Planning Process could be modified to capture his intent."[45]

The ORM model that Lieutenant Colonel McDuffie referred to identifies risks and implements control measures to mitigate those risks.[46] For example, if a pilot were scheduled to fly a mission, bad weather was forecasted, it was the third night in a row the pilot was flying (possible fatigue), and it was a night-time, low-level mission using night vision devices, it might rate as a "high risk" mission, requiring commander approval to fly. Relating this to the current OPT, Lieutenant Colonel McDuffie continued:

> I applied the risk matrix to our COIN problem of identifying key terrain districts and overall risk to our mission. Boxes in the upper left represented districts with the highest

> risk to our mission. Those in the lower right the lowest risk. With the research conducted by Pat Howell on COIN ratios, we simply added the mitigation measures [appropriate COIN ratios] to the boxes, hence ORM applied to COIN. With Colonel Miller's final approval, we now had a graphic tool to help show the quantitative math behind our analysis.[47]

The OPT took these two district rating schemes—the intensity of the insurgency and the importance of each district—and developed a quantitative force-ratio risk matrix based on both COIN and the risk management doctrine just described to determine the number of troops needed to execute COIN at various risk levels. Here they specifically used the more granular study of Quinlivan that had the various COIN ratios based on insurgency levels previously mentioned. After all the district prioritization data was entered into the matrix, the OPT determined total force levels associated with overall risk levels. Major Dembowski pointed out that the ranking of districts allowed the planners to focus on the higher-risk districts. He said, "There are some districts. . . like [many in] Daykundi [Province]. There is really no one out there. . . so we can probably assume risk there [as well]. Nimruz [Province] is another place we can assume risk. There are some districts in Kandahar and Helmand [Provinces] where there is just not much out there and we can assume risk. And we can focus on these [other] major areas. We hoped to shrink down what the total force package would be."[48] As already stated, low risk was calculated to be 480,000 total troops.

Approximately 328,000 total forces provided about a ratio of 14 per 1,000, which was determined to be medium risk by the OPT, and approximately 235,000 was considered high risk. Given that the current COIN forces were approximately 200,000 countrywide, this methodology determined that ISAF needed approximately 35,000 forces just to bring the coalition into the high-risk area. This high-risk output from this matrix somewhat conflicted with the medium-risk tag that the OPT had put on this force increase level in their initial qualitative analysis presented before to answer the "rapid success" earlier framed by General McChrystal. In the final recommendation to the president, a similar figure would also get the medium-risk tag for other qualitative reasons explained later. However, according to the matrix, to get medium risk, approximately 135,000 more forces would have to be added and about 285,000 additional troops for low risk. As already mentioned, any forces added above the 35,000 level would likely be deployed after the vital 12-month point that was essential to provide progress in the timelines mandated to General McChrystal. The force-ratio risk model was developed by the OPT to back up the qualitative analysis with actual modeling analysis. The fact that the CJ2 and RCs had been very close on their rankings of the districts as far as "the level of the insurgency" added to the credibility of the model. They

assessed Kandahar City, for example, as having widespread insurgent activity and as being a major population center that was mission critical. It fell into the "A1" square and was a high-risk priority. It should be resourced at approximately 25 troops per 1,000 people, and these total forces for Kandahar should be resourced even in the high-risk total Afghanistan-wide force level of 235,000. However, this force-ratio risk model was not the only quantitative model or system used.

Quantitative Analysis Using Systems Modeling

The OPT also looked at the systems model from FM 3-24, and they applied it to Afghanistan. The idea is that COIN is a complex, adaptive system, and planners should attempt to use systems dynamics to display and gain insights into the interdependencies of logical lines of operation within the system. When displayed, the resulting chart is a very busy slide that has a multitude of organizational ingredients all connected by a variety of lines. The image became known as the "spaghetti diagram." Capt Brett "Banya" Pierson (US Navy) helped develop the specific Spaghetti Diagram for Afghanistan. The resulting slide was so all-encompassing and complex that when General McChrystal viewed it for the first time at a staff meeting, he quipped, "As soon as we figure this chart out, we've won the war."[49] Another systems model from FM 3-24 showed how various levels of effort along lines of operation, troop ratios, fractiousness of population, and external support/havens illuminated potential impact of proposed COAs. These models showed that historically, properly resourced COIN over time reduced popular support for the insurgency and increased support for the government. The FM 3-24 systems model of COIN is not an exact science allowing for the input of numerous variables into a system or model and then simply extracting a perfect resource solution that provides victory in a specified amount of time. Rather, it is a tool employed to better understand the incredible complexity involved in COIN operations like the ISAF fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Quantitative Analysis Using Other COIN Theories

The troop-to-task OPT also used the work of RAND's James Quinlivan to better understand the resourcing problem. Quinlivan described the ratios of counterinsurgent forces to population needed based on the environment in which they were operating. In a stable country, such as the United States, a peacetime police force of essentially only two to three police per 1,000 people is necessary. However, in a major insurgency, Quinlivan's chart indicates the need for up to 25 counterinsurgents per 1,000 people, which is similar to the

figures in Army FM 3-24. Adding to Quinlivan's assessment, Captain Pierson also stressed the importance of not piecemealing forces into a counterinsurgency but pushing them into the fight as quickly as possible. His ideas influenced the group to come up with an analogy involving a large warehouse on fire in a city. If the fire starts in one corner of the building, it is still small enough to be extinguished and the building saved with the proper number of firefighters. However, in the example, only one fire truckload of firefighters is sent first, and by themselves, they cannot control the fire, so it grows. Then another truck arrives, but now the two crews cannot extinguish the larger fire, and it grows. A third truck arrives, with the same result, followed by a fourth and fifth. By this time, the fire is too large even for the five fire trucks and their firefighters. However, the theory argues that this relatively small fire could have been extinguished right away if three or perhaps all five fire trucks and their respective firefighters had deployed all at once, rather than one at a time. The CJ35 planners believed that counterinsurgencies are like this. If COIN forces are only increased in relatively small piecemeal increments, there is a good chance of the insurgency continuing to spread, eventually to the point where insurgents succeed in defeating government forces and taking over the country. This is arguably what was occurring in Afghanistan since the Taliban had started their campaign to retake the country starting in 2006 through 2009. According to Lieutenant Colonel Howell, when applied to Afghanistan the insurgency represents the "fire" that requires a hypothetical 48 fire trucks. If the coalition had 23 to 25 fire trucks, it could be contained but not extinguished until ISAF had time to build the remaining 25 fire trucks. Of course, the logistical constraints in Afghanistan that allowed only one brigade to be added every three months capped the flow of "fire trucks" that could be rushed to quell the rapidly spreading Taliban insurgent "fire."

Another good source of information for the OPT was the previously mentioned title by John J. McGrath, "Boots on the Ground: Troop Density in Contingency Operations," Global War on Terrorism Occasional Paper 16, or OP 16 for short. In this paper, McGrath examined numerous successful historical counterinsurgencies from the Philippines (1899–1901) to post–World War II Germany and Japan, Malaysia (1948–54), and Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s and 2000s. In each of these cases, the troops per 1,000 population varied from a low of 5 in Japan to 21 in Kosovo. Since Kosovo was a recent successful NATO operation, the troop-to-task OPT picked it as supporting evidence for the figure of approximately 20 troops per 1,000 population found elsewhere in their analysis.

Quantitative Analysis: Summary

A tremendous amount of intellectual work was placed into the troop-to-task OPT's analysis of the quantitative factors that determine proper force ratios in a counterinsurgency. Clearly this type of analysis is an inexact science that does not provide a foolproof answer assuring success. This is one of the reasons that the CJ35 called the "fully resourced" 480,000 counterinsurgents a "low risk" option rather than an option that guaranteed success. However, it does provide estimates that are supported by data from historically successful counterinsurgencies and applied to the specific environment district by district in Afghanistan. The OPT learned that to even have a chance at victory, an initial "bridging" force would have to be added as rapidly as possible to bring total COIN forces in Afghanistan to approximately 235,000. This would be the short-term medium- to high-risk number of forces that could hopefully halt the insurgency and swing momentum back in favor of ANSF and coalition forces. Then over the next few years, the ANSF would grow to a sufficient level to reduce the risk to the point where they would eventually number approximately 480,000 and be large enough to defeat the insurgency. To get to 235,000 total forces from the current total of approximately 200,000, approximately another 35,000 forces would need to be added. The planners knew that one of the additional brigades would be an MEF, which has more organic functions and forces, and, assuming the other brigades were Army, that the four total combat brigades potentially deployed would number approximately 32,000. When the team added the 11,000 support forces, the arithmetic came to approximately 43,000 additional forces. This was slightly more than the 35,000 modeled, but given that the force would only deploy one brigade at a time and was a short-term bridging force, planners considered this the result of putting the quantitative analysis into terms of extra brigades rather than just a total force figure. "We were not worried that the numbers were not the same because we used different methodologies," added Lieutenant Colonel Howell, "but being close made us feel comfortable."[50]

The Qualitative Approach

The quantitative analysis strongly suggested that a bridging force was necessary to prevent the warehouse fire that represented the Afghan insurgency from growing out of control. Beyond the quantitative math, General McChrystal, Lieutenant General Rodriguez, and Colonels Miller and McGrath began to qualitatively sense that the bridging force was necessary as well, even as the RC planners were assessing the ground situation and determining the units

they would need. The strategic assessment, even before it was concluded, was painting a very bleak picture of the state of the counterinsurgency, particularly in RC SOUTH. For this reason, when analyzing how big the bridging force should be, General McChrystal decided not to include any new ANSF growth during the first "bridging" year. As new ANA and ANP troops were graduating from their basic training courses, they would likely need six months to a year to become experienced enough to be effective. To halt the growing insurgency during this period, experienced forces were required. However, the troop-to-task OPT did model that the effectiveness of new ANSF forces would increase over time when partnering with US units. There was simply no time to waste getting more qualified forces into the COIN fight, so the proverbial warehouse fire would not grow to a point where it could not be extinguished and would consume the entire country.

Even prior to the 16–20 July OPT, the RC planners had been working through their commanders, using their professional judgment to analyze the various end-states that General McChrystal had provided on 8 July, from the "just hold on" force to the "rapid success" number. This bottom up planning was important to General McChrystal, as he valued the opinion of his subordinate commanders. According to Lieutenant Colonel Howell, "General McChrystal, from his background, is always asking, 'What does the on-scene commander need?' He was leaving it [much of the qualitative analysis] up to his RC commanders, and so we relied heavily on their input."[51]

The RC planners had taken General McChrystal's latest guidance on the focus of his COIN strategy of protecting the population, improving coalition and ANSF partnering across the echelons of command, and such, and they were already well down the path of figuring out proper force levels even as they arrived for the 16–20 July OPT. The OPT stressed to the group of RC planners that this was not a large wish list but that ISAF was operating in a very constrained resource environment. Lieutenant Colonel Howell stated that the CJ35 Branch told them emphatically, "We are constrained. What can you scrape by with? What is the bare minimum?"[52] And to their credit, according to Lieutenant Colonel Howell, they stayed within the guidance. After coming up with some initial figures, the RC planners went back to confer with their commanders to confirm their analysis. Colonel Miller said, "RC EAST believed that they needed about another brigade of combat power. RC SOUTH did a pretty good analysis, I thought. They wanted about 10 battle groups [battalions], or about three brigades. RC WEST wanted about another brigade. RC NORTH was fairly happy with what they had, as far as the general forces were concerned."[53]

After further refinement down to the battalion and lower levels, the RC qualitative numbers and the total came to between four and five brigades, plus the enablers, which was just slightly more than the total force figure, minus enablers, that had come out of the quantitative analysis. Moreover, since the OPT had determined that only four or five brigades could be deployed in the 12 to 15 months required to be an effective bridging force showing rapid progress, that became the de facto "fully resourced" option number five that General McChrystal had laid out back on 14 July. A few weeks later, an eight-brigade option would be added and become the truly "fully resourced" option. Lieutenant Colonel Howell added:

> When we took the RC numbers, the types of battalions, brigades…Chip Horn from USFOR–A . . . he used some standard planning factors and based on the experience of RFF 920, he said, if we're going to bring in this many troops, it's roughly going to be this many [enabler] bodies. And, while the numbers were not exact, they were really close to each other. We said . . . about 40,000 on the quantitative approach. Well, the four-brigade [qualitative] option was about 45,000 people, [with] the enablers.[54]

General McChrystal was pleased that the qualitative and quantitative planning efforts had produced similar results and also happened to match the logistical estimate of what could realistically be deployed over the next 12 months. Even though he told the group that as the OPT wrapped up he had not made up his mind yet, he stated that he was confident in the credibility of the fully resourced, four-brigade plus enabler option.[55] General McChrystal would often go back and forth during briefings about how many extra brigades he was leaning toward at this point. He would say, "It's going to be three." Then it would be "No, it's four."[56] It appeared that the commander himself was qualitatively zeroing in on figures very close to those recommended by the OPT. After the RC commanders came in with their figures, the OPT had several discussions, crystallizing in their minds what the results had told them. In a way, they were almost laying down the foundations, or at least the resourcing overarching strategy, for the developing campaign plan that Colonel McGrath was devising. In describing this discussion, Colonel Miller said:

> And so we said, "We really need a force here [pointing to the map] because this is the most important thing. We can assume risk up in this [pointing to a different spot] area. We can move to that area once we've created a security bubble here." That is what led us to . . . the four-brigade option, which essentially put a brigade up in Helmand, a brigade in Kandahar, and our last brigade was intended into northern Helmand, northern Kandahar, maybe another brigade in Zabul [Province]. The fourth brigade of that package was intended to go to RC EAST to meet their requirement to stabilize the situation in the P2K [Paktika, Paktiya, Khost] area, where they had the majority of their concerns.[57]

All of this effort culminated in an important briefing to General McChrystal on 31 July. As Colonel Miller put it, he and Colonel McGrath told their commander, "Here is what the packages are, and here is what we've been working on," and it was down to company-level detail.[58] It was after this big briefing that General McChrystal decided he needed to inform US leadership of the initial results of his resource planning. The bulk of the quantitative and qualitative planning efforts were now complete, as was the internal ISAF and USFOR–A logistical support analysis required to bring in and bed down a force of approximately 43,000 counterinsurgents and enabling forces. Now, following the delinking of the troop-to-task from the strategic assessment, General McChrystal and his CJ35 and CJ5 teams would have time to refine their analysis and prepare to make their case for more resources up the chain of command.

Submission of the Strategic Assessment

In early August, General McChrystal was leaning toward a four-brigade plus enabler force increase option, but he had not formally decided anything yet. Two other ISAF priorities were entering their culminating states during August. First, the strategic assessment was mostly complete, but General McChrystal was asked to delay its submission until after the 20 August Afghan elections so it would have no real or perceived effect on the Afghan political process. Second, the elections themselves, and ISAF's role in providing security for them, was the top ISAF priority in the three weeks leading up to voting day. Unfortunately, because the elections were tainted by allegations of fraud, most of which apparently favored President Karzai, the post-election period was in many ways more turbulent than the pre-election period for ISAF and the political leaders of the coalition partners. Notwithstanding this, the strategic assessment could not wait forever for submission, and it was finally submitted to Admiral Mullen and Secretary Gates on 30 August.

Although officially the troop-to-task assessment had been pushed to a point in time after the strategic assessment, General McChrystal decided to discuss the early progress of the force options with Admiral Mullen and Admiral Stavridis on 2 August in Lisbon, Portugal. The three were in Lisbon at a NATO Chiefs of Defense Conference, where General McChrystal briefed the two admirals on the results of his strategic assessment. General McChrystal did not share the early troop-to-task results with the larger NATO group, as he did with the two US admirals. He shared with the Chairman and the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) the potential gains and risks associated with each of the six force options that the CJ35 analyzed. General McChrystal made it clear that at this point, he was not recommending a specific

force option, but clearly force option 5 had the best assessment of the group. As Colonel Miller put it, "The strategic assessment told us that status quo was a loss. We could do 'status quo better,' but we'd still lose. 'One Brigade' was very 'maybe' whether we could really break the momentum and gain the initiative and turn it around in the south. The four-brigade option was really where we thought . . . with any degree of confidence was going to give us enough combat power to be able to move forward."[59] The overall takeaway of the briefing was that to have the best chance for success with the least of amount of risk, force option 5 was the optimal option. Each of the other options starting with force option 4 and working backwards up the chart carried greater amounts of risk of coalition failure with the "no change" option at the top assessed to assure insurgent success.

In many ways, the turbulence caused by the Afghan presidential election and the resultant delay in the strategic assessment submission bought some time for the troop-to-task planners. In early August, Colonel Miller decided that his own ISAF CJ35 team needed outside assistance to examine the likely force options and validate some of the logistical estimates and assumptions. He talked to General McChrystal about it. Colonel Miller said, "General McChrystal talked to General Petraeus and asked for a team of high-speed planners. Rich Wiersema . . . brought a team of six or eight guys with specialties in a variety of different areas: engineers, log [logistics] guys, and an aviation planner . . . from all the services. We had them sign a nondisclosure statement. We said, 'Help us make determinations on 'Can we close the force? How long will it take? What things have we left out as far as different kinds of enablers?'"[60]

USCENTCOM indeed sent a team of planners who helped put some meat on the bones of the logistics plan. They stayed approximately 10 days and validated many of the earlier assumptions and estimates CJ35 and USFOR–A had made. The USCENTCOM team signed nondisclosure statements, and they were not permitted to share the details of the planning effort with anyone. However, this small team did not preclude the eventual need to bring in many more subject matter experts from multiple organizations, including USTRANSCOM, the services headquarters, and others at USCENTCOM and their subordinate service components. Many actions have to be accomplished well ahead of such large numbers of troops and equipment being delivered to Afghanistan. The longer the troop-to-task OPT continued to work in secrecy, the more risk of the future force increase, if approved, being delayed because of a lack of wider coordination.

The Leaking of the Strategic Assessment

September began with many leaders in the international community gravely concerned with the apparent fraud of the Afghan presidential election. President Obama was pondering the future of US involvement in Afghanistan with a potentially tarnished leader in Karzai, who might never be able to rid his war-torn nation of the stranglehold of corruption. In many ways, there could not have been a worse month for General McChrystal to submit a request for more forces to properly resource his COIN strategy. Yet the situation in Afghanistan would likely only further deteriorate without these additional forces to stop insurgent momentum, so General McChrystal worked with the key troop-to-task staff, preparing both a briefing that he would give to his military leadership and eventually the president and a written document outlining his recommendation. Although he felt the gravity of the situation, General McChrystal would not let political pressure change his resource recommendation one way or the other. Colonel Miller said, "He did tell us, and this is another great thing I respect about General McChrystal, that he is not going to tell people [simply] what they want to hear. He is going to give them his best military advice. Now he might do that in private, and once they give him the answer, then he would support it. He was going to use his best military judgment based on all that we had given to him, based on all his battlefield circulation, based on everything. And that was what he was going to recommend."[61]

The basic troop-to-task analysis that went into the 2 August briefing at Lisbon was the same information that was the backbone of a 25 September brief to Admiral Mullen, General Petraeus, Admiral Stavridis, and others that accompanied the submission of the written report. However, in the seven weeks between the two briefings, the aforementioned Afghan presidential election occurred, the strategic assessment was officially submitted, the campaign plan was completed, and finally, the strategic assessment was leaked to *Washington Post* columnist Bob Woodward. This leak led to a 21 September front page article, titled "McChrystal: More Force or 'Mission Failure,'" that, among other items, quoted the assessment as stating that General McChrystal "needs more forces within the next year and bluntly states that without them, the eight-year conflict 'will likely result in failure.'"[62] With many political leaders in Congress and Vice President Joe Biden recommending a new strategy for Afghanistan, and with President Obama considering a strategy review, some perceived the *Washington Post* leak to be an effort by someone in the military chain of command to undermine a potential shift of presidential policy.

Up to this point, the troop-to-task process had been very carefully guarded to ensure the security of the work. Now it was even more critical that the results of the looming resource report up through the chain of command be handled very carefully. Given that the source of the strategic assessment leak proved elusive to identify, and with some pointing fingers at the military, Admiral Mullen suggested to General McChrystal a way to track a potential resource request leak to its source. The idea was to print only five copies of the report, which was titled *Resourcing the ISAF Implementation Strategy*, and put an identifiable distinct "fingerprint" on each copy, every one different from another. In other words, the copies would be slightly different from each other, in particular areas that would likely be published word-for-word if leaked. The idea was that if this report were leaked, at least the organizational source of the leak could be identified, if not the exact individual.

Major Rumsey wrote the first draft of the classified document. Then Commander Jeff Eggers, who was the final editor of the written product, put identifiable differences in each of the hard copies. The team then placed these hard copy reports in envelopes addressed to each individual to whom they were handed at the 25 September briefing at Ramstein. Two copies went to Admiral Mullen, who kept one and delivered the other to Secretary Gates; Admiral Stavridis also received two, with one going to NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, and the final copy went to General Petraeus. No digital copies were released. Each recipient was given the same time-zone-adjusted exact time on 6 October to open the packages with the *Resourcing the ISAF Strategy* document inside. Each organization had a small team analyze the document and prepare internal advice and recommendations to the organization's respective bosses.

Once the campaign plan was completed on 9 September, Colonel McGrath was able to add an operational element to the troop-to-task analysis. In other words, the CJ35 planners had made some assumptions, albeit in consultation with the campaign planners, about the areas into which forces would flow. Now they would be able to hang some campaign planning details on the structure of their analysis. The completed campaign plan would help complete the briefing narrative required to convince US leadership that a force uplift was required to have the best chance at succeeding in Afghanistan. Now General McChrystal could begin his upcoming briefing by explaining the fundamental differences between Iraq and Afghanistan, then review the results of the strategic assessment, go into the troop-to-task process, analysis, and results, and use the just-completed campaign plan to show how progress would look with each course of action. As Colonels McGrath and Miller

worked on this very important brief and ran it by General McChrystal, they constantly tweaked it. However, the basic format was set.

General McChrystal had decided he would recommend the fully resourced, four-brigade plus enablers option. It came to roughly 43,000 additional forces. However, in consultation with General Petraeus and based on his own refinements, General McChrystal decided to reduce the six force options presented in the 2 August briefing down to just three courses of action (COA). This would simplify the choices, and the president could always tweak one of the COAs up or down based on his own analysis. Moreover, there seemed to be an incongruity between the term "fully resourced" and the 43,000 force option. The troop-to-task analysis had shown in detail that 480,000 was really the fully resourced ideal number of counterinsurgents, but based more on logistical constraints in the rates of arriving US forces and of the ANSF growth, this was not possible for several years. However, after deploying the 43,000 additional forces in approximately 12–15 months, the overall total force strength would still be far less than 480,000 forces. Thus, it was a bit misleading to call this choice the "fully resourced" option. General Petraeus recommended adding a larger force option that in the end of its deployment would more realistically represent a truly "fully resourced" and lower-risk option. This eventually became an eight-brigade plus enablers option. Virtually no one involved with the planning thought that it was politically feasible for the president to send eight more brigades, but as military planners, it was not their job to omit a legitimate course of action based on an assumption that they would be asking for too much.

So the three force options that made it into the 25 September recommendation brief were the following:

1) add the 11,000 ANSF trainers and additional enablers,

2) add the four brigades and enablers and increase partnering in the east and the south, or

3) add eight brigades and enablers and increase partnering across the country.

The first option essentially added the training brigade for the ANSF growth, included the aviation brigade for extra lift and MEDEVAC and other smaller enablers but essentially left the rest of the force unchanged. The second option was the recommended option that came out of the troop-to-task OPT and was what General McChrystal recommended to the 25 September audience and eventually to the president. The third option was that which General Petraeus had recommended adding. The interesting detail with force option 3 (the

eight-brigade option) was that the differences between it and the four-brigade option recommended by General McChrystal would not even present themselves until more than a year after additional forces would begin flowing under either plan. This is the result of the relatively narrow logistical pipe into Afghanistan that allowed only one brigade to flow in approximately every three months. In other words, an entire year would pass before that fifth brigade under force option 3 would start flowing, and it would take an entire year after that to finish deploying the eighth brigade. Thus real results from the additional forces that force option 3 brought in would not even begin to have results until probably the middle of the second year following the president's decision. This raises a real question of whether recommending an eight-brigade option that would not even provide any near-term results would be worth the sticker shock that it might bring back in Washington, DC, in the delicate political environment previously described.

The *Resourcing the ISAF Strategy* Ramstein Brief

In the closing days of September 2009, General McChrystal had a variety of important lines of operation running concurrently. First, he was doing his utmost to halt the progress of the insurgency with the resources he had available. He was also nearing the completion of the ISAF Joint Command standup, with Lieutenant General Rodriguez preparing to officially go operational as its first commander on 12 October. He was also dealing with the ramifications of the controversial Afghan presidential election and a potential runoff on 20 October (later cancelled), as well as the strategic assessment leak. In the midst of all these, he was also preparing to brief and submit the *Resourcing the ISAF Strategy* recommendation, asking through the chain of command to the commander in chief for approximately an additional 43,000 forces.

While there were no formal rehearsals of the briefing to Admiral Mullen, General Petraeus, Admiral Stavridis, and a few other subordinate general officers from USCENTCOM and ISAF on 25 September at Ramstein, there were several preparatory briefings that turned into a larger "macro" rehearsal for General McChrystal. The initial plan had been to have Colonel McGrath give the briefing, with General McChrystal opening it up with some comments, and adding commentary throughout. Colonel McGrath noted, "The first time we put it together, I got up and I presented it to him. And he directed a number of changes. And I took a shot by every one of the generals and [it was] 'go back to the drawing board again.'"[63] Colonel McGrath refined the briefing and presented it again. The strategy of how the briefing would be presented was carefully analyzed. Colonel Miller said of both the briefing and the written

recommendation, "Do you put the 'bottom line up front?' There were a lot of strategic thinkers wondering about how this was going to be received by politicians, pundits, military leaders, and all the guys working over at NATO. There was a lot of 'strategizing' on the composition of the document, on how it was put together."[64]

As the process continued, General McChrystal and others suggested changes, and the brief was revised. This continued a few more times. As these informal rehearsals continued, Colonel McGrath noticed, "More and more he [General McChrystal] would start talking his way through, and he'd cut me off about half way and he'd finish it. The next time he'd just start talking and then he'd say, 'Next slide, next slide.' And so, by the time he got on the airplane, he knew this thing cold."[65]

During this period, General McChrystal had the brief pitched to other key leaders. Both Ambassador Eikenberry and Lieutenant General Rodriguez were specifically briefed and asked for their input. After hearing the various perspectives from all of these sources, General McChrystal began to take ownership of the brief. Colonel McGrath began to appreciate how General McChrystal operated in this area. He said, "He's not one to throw some staff officer up there and sit back and watch him brief. No! He's more along the lines of 'I'm going to *own* this particular problem,' and he takes it very personally. This whole idea of ownership of the plan, and he had got intimate with it and comfortable with it in order to present it."[66]

Interestingly, this is also how the ISAF staff officers involved in the overarching strategic assessment described General McChrystal's leadership during that endeavor. He let his staff work, but as time progressed, he put more of his personal stamp on the product. When it came to this effort, Colonel McGrath stated, "By the end, this was 'his' troop-to-task assessment. . . absolutely one hundred percent! Every single thing on that brief was 'murder-boarded' and managed."[67]

Colonels McGrath and Miller accompanied General McChrystal to Ramstein for the 25 September briefing. Even on the airplane, General McChrystal was having Colonel McGrath make minor adjustments to the briefing. Finally, General McChrystal and his briefing arrived at Ramstein, and he was ready to officially unveil his troop-to-task assessment and resource recommendation.

According to most observers, General McChrystal's 25 September briefing was a home run. General McChrystal opened the briefing by saying, "I've been doing a lot of soul-searching. I came here thinking that I wasn't going to need more forces. I came here thinking that with reorganization, a change in strategy, and other changes, that I wasn't going to need more forces. But having been here for three months now, I've come to the conclusion that to be successful we are going to need additional resources."[68] He then talked about the

results of the strategic assessment, and how that fed into the troop-to-task. The strategic assessment showed that the situation was serious and the conflict complex. The insurgency was resilient and growing, and there was a crisis in confidence stemming from weak Afghan government institutions, corruption, lack of economic opportunity, and insufficient physical protection. General McChrystal's assessment was that the mission could succeed but required a fundamentally new approach. The key to this new approach was to change the operational culture of ISAF, focusing on COIN principles, including winning support of the people. The assessment stressed improving security partnering at all command echelons. It also argued that responsive and accountable governance was an equal in priority with security, and that internal ISAF unity of command and unity of effort must be streamlined. Finally, the strategic assessment illustrated that time was critical and ISAF must be properly resourced to gain and maintain the initiative while ANSF capacity and capability is built.[69]

After summarizing the strategic assessment, General McChrystal presented a slide that illustrated the differences between the operating environments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Afghanistan was more challenging than Iraq because of a variety of factors including terrain, poverty, culture, rural dispersion, safe havens, nature of the insurgency, 30 years of war, and no recent legacy of functional government. By contrast, he described how Iraq had a tradition of strong central government and an organized national military, which made the reestablishment of such systems comparatively easier than doing the same in Afghanistan, where the recent memory for most citizens includes only turmoil and instability with little to no national institutions. General McChrystal also illustrated how Iraq was substantially better resourced than Afghanistan, with almost three times the ratio of security forces to population, and how forces in Iraq were built up rapidly versus gradual increases in Afghanistan.

After showing the recent 2009 force influx and the templated 1 November 2009 ISAF force lay down, General McChrystal went into the adaptive COIN planning and methodology used to analyze the resource requirement. He explained the quantitative and qualitative analysis that went into the troop-to-task, including the use of military doctrine, force-ratio risk modelling, complex systems modelling, and professional military judgment. General McChrystal elucidated on how all of this detailed analysis had pointed to a resource requirement of an additional four brigades plus enablers to bridge the vulnerable near term and provide for ANSF's rapid expansion and development.

At this point, the briefing combined the results of both the troop-to-task assessment and Colonel McGrath's campaign planning effort. Colonel

McGrath developed a masterful set of slides that first explained General McChrystal's new campaign plan and then predicted how each of the three force options would be executed within that campaign plan over 12-, 24-, and 36-month time intervals. The slides showed that force option 1, increasing with a total of approximately 11,000 trainers and enablers, would mildly increase security in RC SOUTH but carried a high risk of failure. Force option 2, adding four brigades plus the 11,000 trainers and enablers, would substantially increase security in the key population centers in RC SOUTH and RC EAST while carrying a moderate risk of failure. Force option 3, adding eight brigades plus the 11,000 trainers and enablers, would eventually expand greater security initially in the same areas as force option 2. Ultimately, by September 2012, there would be added areas of security in RC NORTH and RC WEST. Since logistical constraints allowed only one brigade to flow every three months, force options 2 and 3 were identical for the entire first year after deployment began, and only after that would any added benefit be seen from force option 3. For these reasons force option 3 was considered moderate risk for at least the first year and then only gradually moving to low risk at the 36-month point.

General McChrystal recommended force option 2. Based on the troop-to-task analysis and in his own judgement, General McChrystal believed that force option 1 would not be enough and, as the slide implied with its high-risk designation, would likely fail. The quantitative force-ratio risk model had initially shown the 35,000-force increase as high risk. However, with the enablers increasing the numbers to 43,000 and with the new ANSF units produced during this period not counted (even though many of these new ANSF troops would be partnered with coalition forces), General McChrystal and his OPT planners qualitatively felt this was a medium-risk force option. As far as force option 3, one might wonder why a commander would not recommend the force option that eventually would yield the lowest risk. As a result of his numerous consultations with General Petraeus, Admiral Mullen, and Secretary Gates, General McChrystal knew that 12 to 18 months was the period of time in which he must show significant progress in Afghanistan. If things did not turn around by then, the addition of more forces seemed unlikely to change things. Colonel McGrath pointed out, "The second force package that was presented in Ramstein, essentially. . . said, 'This is what we can reasonably get in during this period of time, and at that point we start to reach the point of diminishing returns. If we haven't turned the tide by this time, if we haven't gained the initiative, then it doesn't make any sense to just keep pumping forces in.'"[70] Colonel Miller added, "The eight-brigade option would have taken so long to get here that it really wouldn't have made much of a difference.

The reason I think that we ultimately went with the four-brigade option is that we thought it was the minimum amount of force that was required to support the campaign plan. And because of the timelines, the eight-brigade option would have taken about twice as long as the four-brigade [option]. It made a big difference."[71]

The briefing was delivered eloquently and convincingly. There were remarkably few questions. General McChrystal tried to keep the brief at more of a macro-level, but because of his preparation, he had all the details of the OPT analysis ready for explanation if necessary. Colonel McGrath was very impressed and said, "He [General McChrystal] talked about it from a commander's perspective. When questions came up, he'd start down the numbers. Everything was addressed in terms of risk. He did a masterful job of presenting this. The degree of comfort to which he can stand up and talk to the Chairman, General Petraeus, SACEUR. . . "effusive with my praise" doesn't go far enough."[72] Colonel Miller added

> I was very, very impressed with the brief. Too bad it wasn't taped, because, for historians, it was a phenomenal event. I had personally done and watched a lot of the work, but to watch him deliver it, his personal pieces having been in the battlespace to hear him talk about how he felt. He [General McChrystal] said, "It doesn't do any good to have Garmsir, and have a security bubble in Garmsir, when the Garmsir farmers can't get their fruit that they are now able to grow to market because the Taliban either owns or interdicts the road between Garmsir and Lashkar Gar which is where they have to get it." You've got a development part; you've got a security piece. To [watch him] put that together was utterly amazing.[73]

Admiral Mullen, General Petraeus, and Admiral Stavridis all appeared to approve of General McChrystal's recommendation of force option 2. Colonel Miller said, "It appeared that he had sold his argument, that the other three four-stars supported him."[74] Colonel McGrath added, "They [the audience] were taking each and every chunk. . . and he'd stop at points, and take a few questions on his methodology and as we started to go through the individual charts right there, where we had population control, where we envisioned it would expand to and why we envisioned that. We'd been through a murder board so many times, the answers just rolled off his tongue. He knew what was going to be asked. Frankly, there wasn't a great deal of challenge."[75]

The President's Strategy Review

Once the troop-to-task results were briefed on 25 September and the *Resourcing the ISAF Strategy* was submitted, staff officers at the Pentagon, USCENTCOM in Tampa, and SHAPE in Brussels all began analyzing the

request. Since USCENTCOM had some planners previously involved at ISAF, no one from the CJ35 Branch went to Tampa to assist with the explanation of the report. However, Colonel Miller did send Lieutenant Colonel Howell from the CJ35 and Lt Col Angus McLeod (UK Royal Army) from the Strategic Advisory Group to SHAPE to assist with the explanation of the analysis behind the resource report at the request of Maj Gen William Mayville. After fully digesting the report, Admiral Stavridis recommended that the entire troop request be added to the CJSOR in order to capture the new requirements and better facilitate additional troop contributions from NATO nations and other ISAF contributing countries.

At this point, planners at USCENTCOM were near frantic that if the information were not released soon to their service components, USTRANSCOM and others, whatever decision the president made, the units would be unable to deploy in time. Too many moving pieces and parts of the deployment plan must be prearranged for the forces to flow as soon as possible after the president made up his mind. Up to this point, General Petraeus backed General McChrystal's call for absolute secrecy, but now the pressure grew too great from his own staff. Maj Gen Michael Jones (US Army), the USCENTCOM J3 had finally gone to General Petraeus and warned him that a large planning conference with all the key stakeholders would have to occur very quickly, or the plan's chances of quick execution would be severely degraded. General Petraeus called General McChrystal, and the two agreed to release the plan to the wider military audience that had a role in ensuring it was implemented properly. Lieutenant Colonel McDuffie said, "The hardest part of force flow planning is not simply 'selling the car' to the administration, it is actually building it, and ensuring it can be delivered on time."[76] In other words, putting the pieces together, identifying limiting factors, computing basing requirements, synchronizing the flow of forces and equipment, and identifying the enablers required are what ensure that a desired course of action is supportable and feasible. This required the participation of the ISAF core planners, all of USCENTCOM's staff and subordinate components, other combatant commands, multiple Department of Defense agencies, the Joint Staff, and coalition representation. Lieutenant Colonel McDuffie concluded, "Although every stakeholder in Afghanistan wanted desperately to support COMISAF's [Commander of ISAF—General McChrystal] concept of operation, they did not all work for him and were kept in the dark due to the required secrecy to "sell the plan." When you do force flow planning, you've got to open the planning process up to a larger community of interest and the critical time had arrived to unveil the plan."[77]

A planning conference to bring together these stakeholders was immediately set up for 26–30 October in Qatar. Through essentially trial and error, the series of similar planning conferences held in 2008 to plan the forces that were eventually approved for RFF 920 started with 30 people and eventually ended up with more than 300. Lieutenant Colonel McDuffie was one of those at the 2008 conferences and, because of his experience, was the de facto leader of this one-time October conference. He said, "Because I had kept my 2008 conference folder and attendee list, at least I knew I had invited the right people. When I was asked about what we would accomplish at this meeting as opposed to potential future conferences, I said, 'This is the only conference, guys. Whatever we decide this week, this is the force flow. This is what is going to the president. There is not going to be a series of five conferences like last time.'"[78] The conference was a big success, with some force planners staying a few days afterwards to get complete fidelity on the three force packages that were decided on to deploy the total number of forces, down to the platoon, squad, and even the individual levels. There would be no other conferences until after the president's decision, and that conference was held to adjudicate the smaller force package than the 43,000 recommended by General McChrystal. It should be noted that the deployment numbers and timelines were still estimates after this conference, absent a complete run of the Joint Force Flow Assessment Support Tool (JFAST) within the Joint Operational Planning and Execution System (JOPES). However, those estimates were better informed than they would have been had the conference not taken place.

Shortly after receiving the word of General McChrystal's troop request, and approximately a month after receiving the strategic assessment, President Obama began a White House review of his Afghan strategy on 29 September. Despite all the attempts at secrecy, by early October, several press articles had already reported that there were indeed three force options presented to President Obama with the approximate numbers of forces similar to what was submitted by General McChrystal in his resource request. Interestingly, since none of the reports contained the exact number of forces, it is likely that none of the actual fingerprinted hard copies were leaked. Instead, someone who had seen one of the reports had just rounded off the different force options and leaked those numbers. Unlike the strategic assessment, this time no one accused General McChrystal or his staff of leaking the numbers, so the strict security surrounding the resource numbers was considered successful and continued in earnest throughout the president's strategy review.

Eventually, General McChrystal personally briefed the president on his request in early October. President Obama conducted his review throughout October and into November, holding at least eight sessions with his strategy

team by 11 November.[79] In that eighth meeting on 11 November, President Obama appeared to have embraced the idea of accepting an additional troop surge but was not happy with the lengthy period it would take to employ the added forces, pointing out that the 30,000 forces in Iraq had arrived in six months. General Petraeus explained that Afghanistan was logistically much more difficult. The president accepted that it would be more difficult but that it would have to be quicker than the plan called for, explaining, "I don't want to be going to Walter Reed for another eight years." He later said, "The only way we'll consider this is if we get the troops in and out in a shorter time frame."[80] At this point, USCENTCOM planners, working with ISAF and USFOR–A, began to do everything in their power to speed up the deployment timelines of incoming forces. The Marine Corps had already done some planning and preparation for deployment under the requests for forces (RFF) that had previously been approved to fill the old CJSOR under General McKiernan but were on hold during this troop-to-task OPT.

Throughout this process, the ISAF troop-to-task OPT was called upon to answer several requests for information (RFI) from the Joint Staff based on questions that were coming out of the strategy review. Most dealt with different potential troop increase levels and how they would be employed, but one was a major challenge. Vice President Biden still had not given up on his "light-footprint" counterterrorism option, and the National Security Council (NSC) asked that General McChrystal and his staff look at it. Lieutenant Colonel Howell pointed out that this question was far different than the questions regarding different levels of force, saying, "All of our questions were about resources except CT option, which questioned the way we were going to fight, a 'ways' question, not a 'means' question. This was a major question because it was, 'We don't agree with your COIN strategy. We think you can do it with a CT strategy.'"[81]

Interestingly, by bringing up the counterterrorism question, the vice president was not questioning the work of the troop-to-task OPT, but of General McChrystal's strategic assessment. Clearly, General McChrystal and his strategic assessment team had already performed exhaustive analysis and determined that a fully resourced COIN strategy provided the best opportunity for success, which had reaffirmed what President Obama's February 2009 Afghan strategy review had also decided. Nevertheless, the CJ35 and CJ5 took another look at what a counterterrorism strategy might look like but once again determined that it would not work. Lieutenant Colonel Howell said, "I think one of the strengths of having General McChrystal being the former CT [counterterrorism] commander was that he was the first to say, 'It's not going to do it. And by itself, it may actually make things worse.'"[82] A CJ35 subsection

of all SAMS-equivalent planners put together a product that analyzed the counterterrorism option and recommended against its implementation.

President Obama eventually ruled against the counterterrorism option, deciding that he would deploy more forces to Afghanistan provided that the military could deploy them more quickly. President Obama and his strategy review team had come up with three force options of their own, based on General McChrystal's input, as well as all the others on his national security team. The options included a high-end force increase of approximately 40,000 troops, which was very similar to General McChrystal's recommended number. The second option from the president's team was a lower option of about 30,000 forces. Their final option was a low-end option of between 20,000 and 25,000 additional troops.[83]

General McChrystal, Colonel Miller, and Colonel McGrath were in Brussels for an extraordinary NATO Chiefs of Defense Conference in October when they completed the specifics on an NSC-requested detailed troop request list for the 43,000 force option 2 plan down to the company level. As they prepared to send the slides that contained the force option details, they all seemed to pause and recognize the historic nature of what they had been doing over the last several months. As they were about to hit "send" on the computer, Colonel Miller remembers, "We were talking about the fact that at some point others would look back and recognize that this was a historic time. We all felt that it was a very interesting time to have lived through."[84]

The President's Decision and the Aftermath

On 24 November, President Obama announced that he would provide the details of his Afghanistan strategy review on 1 December 2009 at the United States Military Academy at West Point. To the planners of the troop-to-task OPT, this was welcome news, as the two months between the submission of the resource request and this announcement had seemed to last forever. Now they would be able to plan using the actual approved final number of added forces rather than just speculating on hypothetical options.

On 1 December, President Obama announced that he would send additional forces to Afghanistan, stating, "As Commander-in-Chief, I have determined that it is in our vital national interest to send an additional 30,000 US troops to Afghanistan. After 18 months, our troops will begin to come home. These are the resources that we need to seize the initiative, while building the Afghan capacity that can allow for a responsible transition of our forces out of Afghanistan."[85]

General McChrystal and the ISAF staff discovered that the 30,000 troops would have to include three brigades plus enablers. This turned out to be a

tricky solution to implement. Lieutenant Colonel Howell said, "Three brigades and 30,000. . . that coincidentally was the hardest thing to fill from a force planner perspective. If it would have been two brigades, 30,000, it would have been extremely easy. All of the enablers would have fit. If it would have been three brigades and 35,000, it would have been tight, but doable. So we got the hardest option to force manage."[86]

One of the things that made the "three-brigade" part of the decision hard was that one of the brigades already lined up to deploy as part of the package was the Marine expeditionary brigade (MEB), the unit that had been preparing already for deployment under the old RFF. The MEB comes with far more organic support than an Army brigade, including more artillery and air support. Eventually, ISAF planners were able to squeeze approximately 2,000 spaces out of its existing force structure and add these to the 30,000, and eventually received several thousand forces from NATO, but not similar one-for-one replacements for the lost brigade and other forces cut from the original force option 2 recommendation. The force planners just prioritized based on the campaign plan and according to Colonel Miller said, "OK, we can accept some risk here, here, and there, and we can give some of those forces back."[87] After the risk-based prioritization, the total force package was approximately 32,000. General McChrystal, through Colonel Miller and his staff, sent in the specific planning details of where and how they would be employed right around Christmas.

Because of the early preparation of the previous RFF, the first of the surge forces was a battalion of Marines that remarkably arrived in late December. The Marine Corps had anticipated the president's decision and had completely prepped for the deployment, just waiting for the word "go." The Marines were also able to fall in on some prepositioned theater equipment and also quickly transferred marine expeditionary unit stocks from Kuwait. These first Marines and others that followed over the next couple of months were used in Operation Moshtarek, the battle to push out the Taliban in the Marjah area of Helmand Province. The initial planning for Marjah had begun back in August, but all remaining RFF 920 deployments, including these Marines, were put on hold during the troop-to-task OPT and the president's strategy review. The total deployment of the 30,000 "surge" force was completed by September 2010.

Conclusion

The latter half of 2009 in Afghanistan was a remarkable period, marking General McChrystal's first six months of command, which spawned a breathtaking planning effort to take a strategic assessment of the operating

environment in-country in order to recommend an overall strategy for defeating the insurgency and then determine the proper amount of forces to implement that strategy. General McChrystal's strategic assessment determined that the insurgency was serious and that without a properly resourced new strategy, the coalition risked mission failure. General McChrystal's troop-to-task planning effort was a complex effort to determine the right amount of COIN forces in an unprecedented complex operating environment. His planning team had to consider multiple planning variables and overcome significant obstacles while trying to determine how many forces should be added to Afghanistan, how quickly they could arrive, and where they should go. This planning team developed an innovative force ratio matrix that considered in what districts the insurgency was strongest and what districts were most important to campaign success. This matrix, along with other quantitative and qualitative analytical measurements helped General McChrystal finally determine the best recommendation to make up his chain of command. Ultimately, this analytical work was instrumental in the overall effort to persuade President Obama to send 30,000 additional forces to Afghanistan despite the arguments of many who preferred a scaled down presence for many reasons, including rising US casualties, questionable Afghan governance, and a recession ravaging the US economy.

No one can say for sure if the right answer was 43,000 additional troops any more than they can completely predict whether 30,000 is enough. Analytical work attempting to capture the correct amount of resources to fight a counter-insurgency in the incredibly complicated environment found in Afghanistan is an inexact science. And then even if you get the resources right, it does not guarantee success. Mathematician James Quinlivan said, "Although numbers alone do not constitute a security strategy, successful strategies for population security and control have required force ratios either as large as or larger than 20 security personnel (troops and police combined) per thousand inhabitants."[88] Lieutenant Colonel Howell paraphrases that quote by saying, "Every [resourcing] number is wrong, but some wrong numbers are less wrong than others."[89] He added his own planning wisdom to his paraphrase, "What does it take to win? Well, I don't know. But we think [it is] around 40,000 additional forces and we've got some things to back it up. We won't know until it's over whether it's right or wrong, but it's a good starting point."[90]

Colonel Miller was also confident in the results of the troop-to-task OPT, stating, "Could we have done it differently? Probably, but we would have likely come up with the same recommendation. The plan is on track. Who knows how it will turn out, but if nothing else, it was one of the most interesting things I've done in my military career."[91]

Colonel McGrath summed up the planning effort, "We certainly didn't take any shortcuts in developing this resource recommendation. It was a product that had been analyzed from every possible angle qualitatively, then checked and rechecked. General McChrystal clearly understood that he had one chance to present his "best military judgment" and he was not going to squander this opportunity. The argument had to be air tight."[92]

Major Dembowski also said he would not forget the entire effort or his CJ35 boss that led his part of it: "Colonel Miller is the heat. . . he was phenomenal. He was a consistent teacher as we went through this. We had this core group of guys and we melded together. We saw the culmination of all of our work on 1 December when the president made his announcement."[93]

Major Horn also recognized the magnitude of the effort: "I feel that my tour there will be the zenith of my military career. The long hours were not a problem because I knew that I had made a major contribution to what will hopefully be a turning point in the war. It was as exciting a job as a staff officer could possibly get."[94]

The surge of 30,000 forces into Afghanistan over the first seven months of 2010 will likely be the last significant troop increase in US and coalition efforts to defeat Taliban insurgents and stabilize the war-torn nation. During the second meeting on the troop-to-task, General McChrystal came into the Gunn Conference Room and said to the small team of planners, "This will probably be the most important thing that we will ever do in our military careers. The number [of forces] we come up with will either win or lose the war for us."[95] This statement was not hyperbole, but a realization by General McChrystal that this would likely be his one chance to ask for extra resources and turn around the fight against the insurgents in favor of the Afghan government. Historians will debate the events surrounding US involvement in Afghanistan and judge their success or failure over time. Regardless of the end-game, future US COIN planners can no doubt learn from the troop-to-task OPT and the methods its planners used to come up with well-researched potential force options to apply against the Taliban. Among the many valuable methods used, the force-ratio risk matrix developed using a district-by-district analysis was an innovative tool that will likely be a valuable asset to any future COIN resource analysis. In retrospect, notwithstanding all of the hard work of his planners, General McChrystal made the final decision using his experience, his intellect, and in all likelihood, his gut as well. Time will tell if he succeeds.

Notes

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4. Ibid.
5. Col Derek Miller (US Army, ISAF, CJ35 Current Operations Plans), interview by the author, 24 April 2010.
6. Maj William Horn (US Army, USFOR-A), to the author, e-mail, 20 May 2010.
7. Col James McGrath (US Marine Corps, ISAF, CJ5 Plans Directorate, deputy director), interview by the author, 27 April 2010.
8. Col James McGrath (US Marine Corps, ISAF, CJ5 Plans Directorate, deputy director), interview by the author, 10 November 2010.
9. Maj Richard Dembowski (US Army, ISAF, CJ35 Current Operations Plans), interview by the author, 7 May 2010.
10. McGrath, interview, 27 April 2010.
11. Miller, interview.
12. Lt Col Patrick Howell (US Army, ISAF, CJ35 Current Operations Plans), interview by the author, 26 April 2010.
13. Rear Adm Gregory Smith (US Navy, lead, Strategic Communication Working Group), interview by the author, 5 November 2009.
14. Ibid.
15. Miller, interview.
16. McChrystal, interview.
17. McGrath, interview, 27 April 2010.
18. Lt Col Patrick Howell (US Army, ISAF, CJ35 Current Operations Plans), notes.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Paraphrased quote from Howell, notes.
22. Ibid.
23. Miller, interview.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. McGrath, interview, 27 April 2010.
27. Howell, interview.
28. Howell, notes.
29. Author's notes from meeting and multiple other sources.
30. Miller, interview.
31. Lt Col Patrick Howell (US Army, ISAF, CJ35 Current Operations Plans), to the author, e-mail, 22 May 2010.
32. Lt Col Roger McDuffie (US Marine Corps, CENTCOM), interview by the author, 15 May 2010.
33. Michael D. Shear, "McChrystal Flown to Denmark to Discuss War with Obama," *Washington Post*, 3 Oct 2009.

34. McChrystal, interview.

35. Col James McGrath (US Marine Corps, ISAF, CJ5 Plans Directorate, deputy director), to the author, e-mail, 21 April 2010.

36. McGrath, interview, 27 April 2010.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. This paper is available from the Defense Technical Information Center at http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA456584.

40. Howell, e-mail.

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42. Miller, interview.

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44. Ibid.

45. Lt Col Roger McDuffie (US Marine Corps, CENTCOM), e-mail, 21 May 2010.

46. Marine Corps Institute, *Operational Risk Management 1-0* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2002).

47. McDuffie, e-mail.

48. Dembowski, interview.

49. US Army General Stanley McChrystal, remark overheard by the author at the meeting.

50. Howell, e-mail.

51. Howell, interview.

52. Ibid.

53. Miller, interview.

54. Howell, interview.

55. Ibid.

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Abbreviations

AFDD	Air Force doctrine document
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
ARCENT	US Army Central Command
BCT	brigade combat team
CGSC	Command and General Staff College
CJOC	Combined Joint Operations Center
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
COA	course of action
COIN	counterinsurgency
COP	combat outpost
CSTC–A	Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan
FOB	forward operating base
FM	Field Manual
IJC	International Security Assistance Force Joint Command
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JFAST	Joint Force Flow Assessment Support Tool
JOPES	Joint Operational Planning and Execution System
MEB	Marine expeditionary brigade
MEDEVAC	medical evacuation
MEF	Marine expeditionary force
MRAP	mine-resistant ambush-protected
NSC	National Security Council
NSPP	National Security Policy Program
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OP TOLO	Operation Tolo
OPT	operational planning team
ORM	operational risk management
RC	regional command
RFF	request for forces
RFI	request for information
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander, Europe
SAMS	School of Advanced Military Studies

SAW	School of Advanced Warfighting
SecDef	Secretary of Defense
SHAPE	Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe
UK	United Kingdom
USCENTCOM	US Central Command
USFOR–A	United States Forces–Afghanistan
USTRANSCOM	US Transportation Command

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