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Dilettantes of War -The Impact and Importance of a U.S. Tribal Engagement Strategy in Afghanistan

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**Dilettantes of War -The Impact and Importance of a U.S. Tribal Engagement
Strategy in Afghanistan**

By

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A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor in Humanities and
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Abstract

Since 2019, the Taliban and U.S currently engaged in peace talks, now is the time to reconsider the Tribal Engagement Strategy (TES) implemented by U.S Army Major Jim Gant in 2010-2012. *The Impact and Importance of a U.S. Tribal Engagement Strategy in Afghanistan* argues for the 2010-2012 successes of TES in Afghanistan and its potential future benefits for other regions.

Peace talks or troop reduction negotiations are not peace for the people of Afghanistan. Once the Taliban assumes control, establishing a new TES will lead to much needed security for the people of Afghanistan. After nineteen years of war, first hand and investigative reports favor the implementation of a TES against an ascending power like the Taliban. American political and military leaders must accept that most Afghans have a strong refusal to be ruled by any central government, including the Taliban. A U.S commitment to TES can develop lasting, meaningful, and strategic relationships with the local populations of Afghanistan.

Should the Taliban regain control as the governing force inside Afghanistan, as it did in 1996, an American TES might be the last chance to reduce the most radical aspects of this resilient adversary. By supporting those tribes who refuse the Taliban rule of Sharia law, America's national security may once again depend on the TES and the ability of those U.S forces to fight alongside the tribes in Afghanistan.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank every U.S service member for trying the best they could in impossible situations. For those of us who have shouldered the cost of war, we can always stand together and change the future. To the people of Afghanistan and Iraq, I wish you peace and a return to your rich history. The world needs your culture, kindness, and dreams. Please do not abandon your faith in America, keep us in your hearts and prayers so we may build a more peaceful future. I hope to one day return to better circumstances.

To my professors at Dominican University of California, thank you for an enlightening experience. I am forever grateful to have shared such a sacred space and time. The experiences and lessons learned are now invaluable to my journey ahead. My goal is to bring the humanities back into the forefront of government.

Finally, thank you Mr. Gant for giving humanity a voice of reason on the battlefield. Perhaps one day soldiers like yourself can decide how a war will be won or lost without the interference of bureaucracy, corruption, and incompetence. Your dedication to the people of Iraq and Afghanistan is an inspiration. ODA 316 was a silver lining that America can do better, and must do better. I wish you fair wind, and following seas on your journey.

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Introduction

“We have killed thousands and thousands of the “enemy” in Afghanistan and it clearly has not brought us closer to our objectives there. We could kill thousands more and still not be any closer five years from now.”
U.S Army Major Jim Gant

The 2001 U.S led invasion of Afghanistan, known as Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), is currently the longest, and second most expensive war in U.S history. After nineteen years, and upwards of a trillion dollars, America is now reduced to negotiating with a physically expanding and politically powerful Taliban. The root cause for this defeat is the misunderstanding of tribalism in Afghanistan. Because the United States of America has so severely miscalculated the multi-ethnic, multicultural, multilingual society of Afghanistan, American military forces have lost the chance to reduce extremism and violence for decades to come. While not the first global power to concede defeat, America now joins Alexander the Great, the British Empire, and the Soviet Union as failed invaders in a historic and battle-hardened region.

With this tragic loss, America’s leadership, who at one point had the Taliban on the brink of defeat, is now forced to negotiate a hasty and humiliating exit. After nineteen years of hard fighting by American and NATO forces, the people of Afghanistan will not live free from fear. America has failed to deliver on the promises of 2001.

“The name of today's military operation is Enduring Freedom. We defend not only our precious freedoms, but also the freedom of people everywhere to live and raise their children free from fear...The battle is now joined on many fronts. We will not waiver, we will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail. Peace and freedom will prevail.”
President George W. Bush, October 7, 2001.

In 2010, an American Special Forces Officer named Jim Gant, aka Lawrence of Afghanistan, successfully implemented a historically proven military tactic called the Tribal Engagement Strategy (TES). By understanding tribal affinity in Afghanistan, Gant offered proof that America finally had a strategy that could cultivate deep alliances with the native Pashtuns, Taziks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and Baloch tribes, further denying the Taliban's ability to assert itself as the first pure Islamic state government, a goal they may very well achieve in 2020. Had America's military invested in TES sooner in Afghanistan, it may have severely reduced future generations of anti-American jihadist while also creating a much more constructive and meaningful relationships with the tribes. In 2010, Major Gant proved that America is capable of fielding soldiers who form meaningful relationships in the internal affairs of tribal countries like Afghanistan. When the soldiers of America understand the issues of the Afghan people and tribes, American national security interests benefit. For all of Gant's accomplishments, the U.S Army still betrayed, humiliated, and demoted him. Stripped of his Green Beret honors, he was forced into retirement at a reduced rank. His crime; beating the Taliban in Afghanistan, taking care of his men, and caring about the people of Afghanistan. The Tribal Engagement Strategy was something the American public needed to know about had they ever been told the truth about what happens inside war zones. To start his paper *One Tribe at a Time*, Gant wrote honestly about his limitations and capabilities:

"I emphasized at the beginning of this paper that I am neither a strategist or an academic. I know there will be many criticisms that span all levels of war, from military personnel to pundits. But I also know this: I will get on a helicopter tonight, armed with an AK-47 and three hundred rounds of ammunition and put my life on the line and my strategy to the test. Will you do the same?" (180)

Without a strong commitment to a winning strategy, the financial cost for America's "War on Terror" in Afghanistan and Iraq, including current spending on veteran care may cost over \$6 trillion dollars as of mid 2020, and since the majority of the money was borrowed the final cost will be even higher. Two decades of war has killed almost 7,000 U.S troops and injured more than 53,000. Any American wondering what was the primary war strategy in Afghanistan will be disappointed. Since the onset of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the primary U.S strategy to defeat the Taliban has been a massive investment in the creation of a strong central government of Afghanistan. This resulted in unprecedented corruption, and almost zero security prospects for the Afghan people. The U.S funded Afghan police are considered worse than the Taliban, and so the Taliban controls more territory in 2020 than in 2001. Investment in the Afghan tribes was not a primary consideration by the Department of Defence.

For America, any Tribal Engagement Strategy (TES) was going to be the most effective form of defeating the Taliban in Afghanistan. Had America's military strategy fully supported soldiers like Major Gant, an American Army officer living amongst an Afghan tribe capable of executing strategies that organically erode the support of the Taliban. With failure currently imminent for America in Afghanistan in 2020, I propose that any future TES should be given the full support of the American military and political leadership. In this thesis, I will provide evidence as to why a strategy that relies on a central Afghan government for security does not work in tribal countries like Afghanistan.

To support my claim that a TES will be the best option for future insurgent warfare, or warfare that aims to dismantle extremism driven ideology groups, I will draw on recently declassified documents from the U.S Inspector General (IG) about the past failures of the current war in Afghanistan, and also examine some historical U.S and British experiences with tribal warfare in this region; Thus, I will conclude that committing to a Tribal Engagement Strategy (TES) would have lead to a more successful implementation of security, and much needed prosperity for the people of Afghanistan. Because the U.S Military has stopped counting how much of Afghanistan is controlled by the Taliban since 2018, providing a current territorial map of this region is difficult. On page 12, the map from the Council fo Foreign relations shows the difficulty of any military strategy that does not consider the two major ethnic groups along the Durand Line.

“The Durand Line is the 2,640-kilometer (1,640-mile) border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It’s the result of an agreement between Sir Mortimer Durand, a secretary of the British Indian government, and Abdur Rahman Khan, the emir, or ruler, of Afghanistan. The agreement was signed on November 12, 1893, in Kabul, Afghanistan...The 40 million Pashtuns in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other countries, are the largest tribal group in the world. Pashtuns are considered a tribal group because their political structure is based on family or clan.” Mary Schons, National Geographic Magazine. Jan 11, 2011.

So while TES should be given the full support of the American military and political leadership in 2020, American objectives should always consider the tensions created by the colonial forces from the past. The Taliban’s relationship to Pakistan has always been the achilles heel of the current U.S military strategy in Afghanistan.

10 Year Military and Security Situation Timeline in Afghanistan:

May 1, 2020- Congressional Research Service (CRS) updates release report R45122:

Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy Brief

April 8, 2020-Afghan government releases 100 Taliban prisoners

April 7, 2020-Taliban walk out of talks in Doha, Qatar

February 29, 2020- U.S., Taliban Sign Deal on Path to Peace

December 19, 2019- Washington Post releases *The Afghanistan Papers*

September 7, 2019- US President Trump Calls Off Peace Talks

February 2019- U.S.-Taliban Peace Talks Progress

January 2018- Taliban Launches Major Attacks Amid U.S. Escalation

August 21, 2017- US President Trump Signals Prolonged Afghan War

July, 2016- US President Barack Obama says 8,400 US troops will remain in Afghanistan into 2017. NATO also agrees to maintain troop numbers and reiterates a funding pledge for local security forces until 2020.

June 24, 2014- ABC news interview of [General David Petraeus: 'Going Native' to Win in Afghanistan](#)

March 24, 2014- Ann Scott Tyson publishes *American Spartan: The promise, The Mission, And The Betrayal of Special Forces Major Jim Gant*

May 27, 2014- US President Obama Announces U.S. Troop Withdrawal

Fall 2013- Gant returns to Mangwel as a civilian with his wife Ann Tyson with no U.S. military protection

June 2013- Afghan Security Takeover Completed

March 2012- Major Jim Gant is relieved from his command

June 22, 2011- US President Obama Announces Troop Drawdown

May 1, 2011- Osama bin Laden Killed

May 2010- Major Jim Gant deploys to Mangwel, Afghanistan

September, 2009- Jim Gant publishes his paper *One Tribe at a Time*

As the timeline suggests, Major Gant's paper did not sway high level officials for the United States or NATO from investing into the central government of Afghanistan, but it did influence ground level commanders such as US four star general David Petraeus to give Gant's team a chance at success in the summer of 2010. For 22 months he fought with, and for the tribes of Afghanistan. While this strategy was foreign for most coalition forces, many journalists and Afghan citizens openly questioned the US President's strategy for the creation of a central Afghan government from scratch.

Prince Ali Seraj wrote to Al Jazeera about the issues of ignoring the tribes:

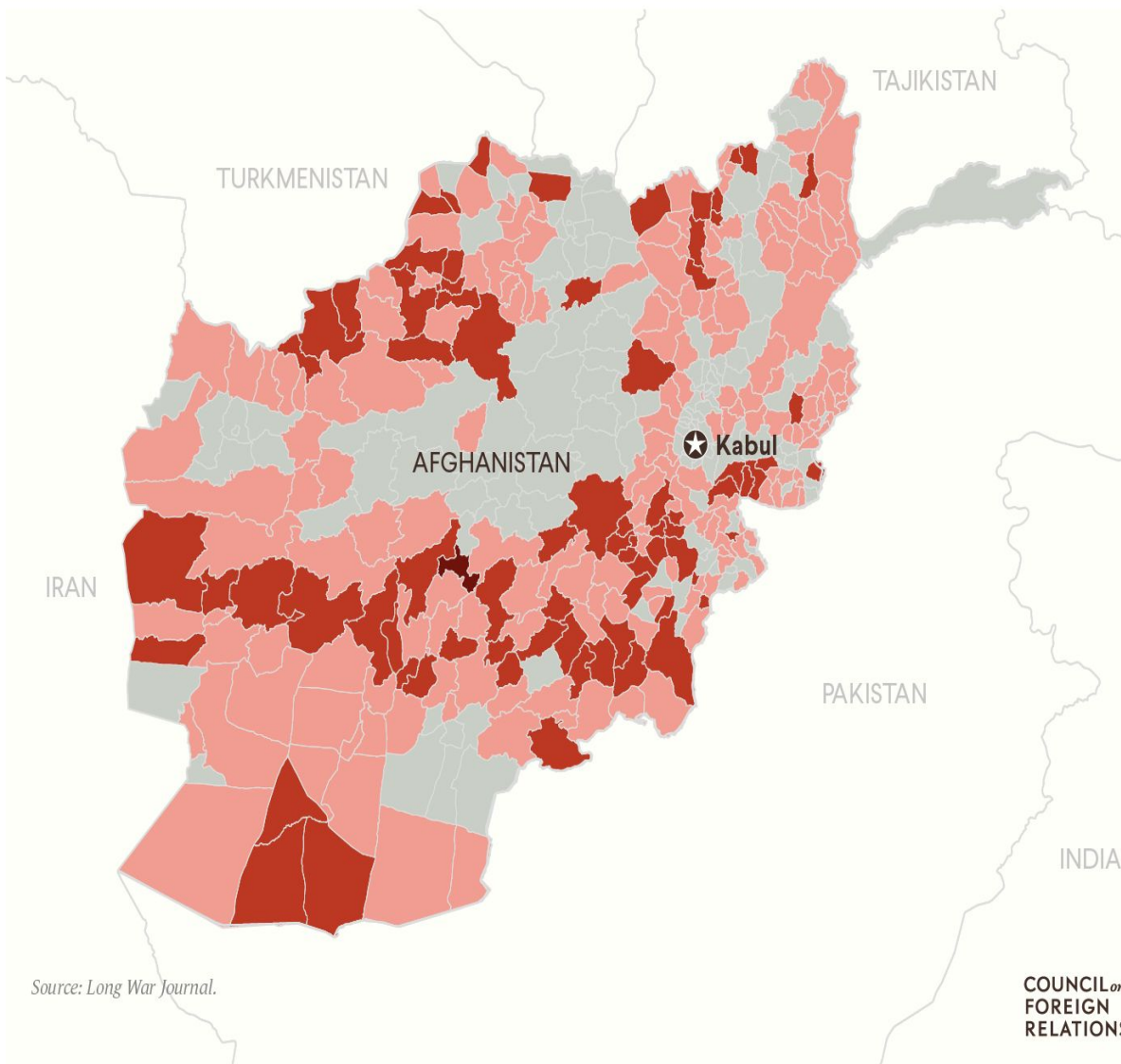
The future of a peaceful Afghanistan is in the hands of the tribes of Afghanistan. They are the warriors. They hate the Taliban as much as anyone else, but they stand on the sidelines, helpless. They want to fight the militants, but cannot do so without NATO approval. Should they attempt to take the matter into their own hands, they would be mistaken for Taliban fighters and be killed. Peace will not come to Afghanistan without the cooperation of the tribes. They can and will defend their motherland, only if the Western forces would realise that the tribal people are the saviours of Afghanistan rather than the destroyers.- **Prince Ali Seraj, president of the National Coalition for Dialogue with the Tribes of Afghanistan. Feb 2, 2014.**

The map below indicates that the central government in Afghanistan is losing more and more territory with America's support. The Afghan security forces funded by the U.S might not last to the end of 2020. How the SARS-CoV-2 virus affects the battle for more control is yet to be seen, but if a vaccine is developed, any relationships previously developed during all TES missions may be a way to help reduce Taliban influence.

Taliban Control in Afghanistan

Control by district, as of February 2020

■ Taliban control ■ Unconfirmed Taliban control ■ Government control or undetermined ■ Contested



Point One- Evidence to demonstrate how current U.S strategies that rely on Afghan central government security forces do not work in tribal countries:

Until Gant's successes in 2010-2012, the U.S military and government agencies that conduct and manage the wars on terrorism did not seem to fully understand how tribalism in Afghanistan could be used to fight Islamic extremism. This severe misunderstanding by the U.S and British governments, both governments with their own experiences in warfare with the tribes of Afghanistan, has somehow led to a strategy based on forming a new Afghan government and the creation of a new Afghan military force. The U.S and NATO strategy for OEF was one of creating, funding, bribing, training, and equipping the new Afghan National Army (ANA), and the Afghan National Police (ANP) to fight against the Taliban. The strategy to heavily invest in a centrally controlled force in Afghanistan has failed spectacularly. This failure has led to the Taliban controlling more territory, over a population who may actually prefer Taliban control over the corrupt central government America helped create. The New York Times recently published an opinion piece from an Afghan politician about the negotiations process in 2020:

Afghanistan needs to empower its people by allowing them to elect provincial and local authorities and minimize undue reliance on the central government. Locally elected authorities enjoy a higher degree of public trust and more efficiency because they have a better understanding of problems and complexities. Ahmad Massoud, April 14 2020. New York Times.

America's large invasion forces are trained to be lethal in modern mechanized battle from WWII, yet are indifferent to local customs and traditions. This may be the reason that a peace deal with the Taliban is now the current U.S exit strategy in 2020. Negotiating with a resurgent Taliban who does not recognize or respect the U.S backed government of Afghanistan is a massive strategic blunder, and a colossal waste of U.S taxpayer dollars. The removal of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda from Afghanistan never required the U.S to create a central government, and yet American taxpayers have bankrolled perhaps the most corrupt army and police force in the world for almost twenty years.

The issue of permanently removing or reducing the Taliban only required U.S forces to understand the complex group identities, values, and behaviors of the tribes in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Any Tribal Engagement Strategy (TES) requires dedicated soldiers who have the talent, resources and political backing for actually winning a decades long conflict on the ground. Instead, America's elected political leaders have so far lacked the courage and fortitude to tell the truth to the world, and actually make the future a better place for Afghans.

As the USSR proved in the 1980's, any strategies that rely on high tech weaponry, and heavy-handed conventional forces was never going to work against the unconventional, ideological, and long term resistance of the Taliban. The fighters of this region have a saying, "I have been a Pashtun for six thousand years, a Muslim for thirteen hundred years, and a Pakistani for twenty-five." - Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Freedom Fighter. Instead of more troop surges or corrupt officials, America needed

highly trained Special Forces soldiers who can interact, live, and foster relationships within the existing tribal network to fight against the oppressive Taliban. A U.S strategy of networking U.S Special Forces, and tribal warriors whose ancestors have defeated the invasion forces of many armies, is the core principle of a TES, and is the winning strategy for Afghanistan.

Recent reports from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), including over four hundred “Lessons Learned” interviews, prove that U.S military commanders struggled with the most basic military concepts and never had any clear objectives for the War on Terror. The interviews in the SIGAR report, reflected the incompetency and disorganization within the Pentagon, as well the manipulated spin of the conflict to the public.

For America, steady progress was the narrative repeatedly told to the world, all at the expense of 157,000 dead in Afghanistan since 2001 and counting. Not having to lie is why strategies like TES matter, a national security strategy and policy that is based upon genuine interactions with the U.S Military in Afghanistan, and the people America is trying to help. The SIGAR reports also indicate a serious disconnect between political and military objectives, and the result appears to be a strategy of public deception, corruption, and incompetence.

Previously classified memos from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, “I have no visibility on who the bad guys are in Afghanistan or Iraq... We are woefully deficient in human intelligence” (2003). While Sec. Rumsfeld struggled to define the enemy in 2003, a 2015 interview of retired U.S Army lieutenant general Douglas Lute, a

former U.S ambassador to NATO, and White House war czar for Afghanistan from 2007-2013 admitted in his SIGAR interview that, “We were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan, We didn’t know what we were doing.”

This situation has not improved, and fourteen years later US President Donald J. Trump still fails to realize that the Taliban has already won the upper hand in outlasting the U.S, same as the USSR. Trump continues with the facade of imminent victory for the United States as exemplified in his speech to the graduating Army class of 2017.

“Our troops will fight to win. We will fight to win. From now on, victory will have a clear definition: attacking our enemies, obliterating ISIS, crushing al Qaeda, preventing the Taliban from taking over Afghanistan, and stopping mass terror attacks against America before they emerge.”
President Trump, August 21 2017, Arlington Virginia.

The lack of real strategy from Trump is simply more of the same, and even more proof on why a TES is the best option in tribal based societies. Our troops will not win the fight against the Taliban because they are no longer actively fighting, and even when they were, the plan was to give the power to the Afghan government forces and not the people. The only clear definition for President Trump is a quick peace treaty and full withdrawal before the next election. The Taliban will most likely resume power and take over Afghanistan in the next year or so. America remains just as vulnerable to attack as before Operation Enduring Freedom of 2001.

Point Two- TES was and will be the best option for future insurgent warfare, or warfare that aims to dismantle extremism driven ideology groups

Because Afghanistan has a history of “confounding the optimism of invaders” (book: *In Afghanistan*), the Tribal Engagement Strategy is not a new approach in dealing with the complexities of ancient tribes in warfare. In 1879, Sir Robert Sandeman of the British Army recognized a strategy to “deal with the hearts and minds” of the people of Afghanistan. In 2010, U.S Army Major Jim Gant used a TES to defeat Islamic extremism alongside the tribes of Afghanistan. Major Jim Gant and his fellow soldiers made TES a reality. Unlike Gant, most American politicians and generals have lacked the courage to support the tribes, and for this we will leave Afghanistan disgraced. This lack of support is incredibly confusing to the Afghans that Bush pledged to help in 2001, as America is a world superpower who lacks the ability to accomplish the missions that U.S Presidents keep promising.

While several factors will be the cause of this, the lawyers, generals, politicians and policymakers in Washington D.C will much prefer to argue about the rules of battles, instead of focusing on the outcomes of wars. Examples of this negligence can be found in “The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of the War”. This paper was published by the Washington Post in December 2019 to prove that American leadership had an unclear mission and a failed strategy for decades in Afghanistan.

For 22 months Gant and his men fought alongside the Pushton tribe in Afghanistan against the Taliban. Gant knew in 2009 when he wrote his paper, that if the tribes were ignored, America would end up funding the corrupt central government of

Afghanistan and would lose the entire war. As of May 2020, that is exactly what has happened. While Gant was living, learning, and fighting alongside the Afghan tribes, he was also inspiring the U.S soldiers within his command to perform at unprecedented levels previous to their TES assignments. One of the most extraordinary aspects of the TES mission for ODA 316 was the capacity for ordinary soldiers, as in not formally trained Special Forces soldiers, to adapt and perform in capacities not usually expected of them. Gant's effective leadership is proof that some conventional forces can be used in TES when given the proper leadership, mentorship and guidance.

Normally a TES strategy would be the exclusive job of an Army Special Forces ODA team, but the U.S military has many other high-level Special Operations Forces (SOF), and even conventional forces that could excel at Tribal Engagement Strategies. SOF units excel at small man teams because they are made up of soldiers who volunteer for selection and training that emphasizes teamwork, physical toughness and problem solving under duress. The soldiers who lack these qualities are eliminated early on in the program. Gant describes a principal tenet that any TES will also need Tribal Engagement Teams (TET) to “advise, assist, train and lead’ the tribal forces they are paired with. Under ‘assist,’ we need to add ‘arm and supply’”(77). TES is a mission capability that could be expanded in the future, but having women soldiers assume leadership roles, and also become members of SOF units themselves, will ultimately make America SOF forces some much needed perspective and versatility. As of January 2016, women are now allowed to volunteer for elite Navy and Army SOF units.

Just as corporate America profits from the leadership of women across business, America must also capitalize on this new to Special Operations talent pool.

Related to the successes of Jim Gant and the Tribal Engagement Strategy (TES), we must also examine the history of the tribes in Afghanistan, the rise of the Taliban, and the influences from the Saudi financed madrassa system of fundamentalist education in Pakistan. Gant understood that the version of Islam practiced by the Afghans he was working with was moderate. The Taliban version of Deobandi Islam and the Wahhabism practiced by Saudi Arabia and perpetuated by Osama Bin Laden and Al-Queda are not native to the tribes of Afghanistan or Pakistan, and are the common enemy of America even before September 11, 2001. This is a key to the TES strategy, and perhaps Washington's greatest policy failure in Afghanistan. The misconceptions and misunderstandings about Afghan society in Washington have allowed the Taliban to control the negotiating table with President Trump, while also refusing to hold any direct talks with Afghan government until the withdrawal of American troops is finalized.

Western negotiators who are ignorant about the history of Afghanistan should explore the book *Invisible History: Afghanistan's Untold Story*, by Paul Fitzgerald and Elizabeth Gould. This rich text provides some history and context of this complex and beautiful country to help describe the origins of the name Afghan:

Originally known as Aryana, for the mother goddess of the Indo-Aryans, some western historians suggest that variations on the name "Afghan" may go back as early as the third century CE... Ethnic Afghan historian Maulavi Khairuddin maintains however... that the name descends from the grandson of King Saul of Israel... Pashton history maintains the name descends from "Afghana," the commander of King Solomon's army. (26)

Americans have underestimated the will of an indigenous people to wage guerrilla warfare in unforgiving terrain yet again. Britain also seems to also understand very little about Afghanistan, even after suffering heavy military losses in the 19th century. British Officer (name here) learned “the strength of their clan and tribal ties gave Afghans the ability to survive without effective central government to impose its will” (23). The British would relearn this lesson 160 years later during America’s “War on Terror”. Jim Gant understood that the desire of the tribes to reject the Taliban was critical. In 2009, prior to his deployment to Afghanistan, Gant warned of any military strategies that depended solely on a strong central government from Kabul would fail:

“A strategy in which the central government is the centerpiece of our counterinsurgency plan is destined to fail. It disenfranchises the very fabric of Afghan society” (10).

Afghan tribes have ancient warrior codes of conduct for the modern battlefields of today, and so they may instinctively recognize some western Special Forces teams like Gant’s ODA 316 as warrior tribes also. Jim Gant was respected, and accepted by the Afghan village elders because of his willingness to learn the Pashtuns customs and traditions. The more Gant’s Tribal Engagement Team (TET) connected, and established relationships with the tribe, the better the military intelligence became, and the more effective the fighting was. The tribes begin to defeat the Taliban and the bond becomes stronger and stronger. With Gant’s tribe winning, U.S and NATO forces should have made informed decisions on how to make more tribes win. Doing this while preserving

Afghan life, cultural and religious traditions should have been the goal from the onset.

Gant explains this:

Pashtunwali has a definite effect on the tactics, techniques and procedures used, not only to fight the insurgency but to get the local population on our side. The Pashtun tribes will fight any and all outsiders, and refuse to accept being ruled by a central government... In many cases the Taliban rule of law (Sharia law) is in direct conflict with Pashtunwali. We currently are not using this to our advantage. (86)

Despite Gant's recommendations to his superiors at the Pentagon, Washington's war strategy continued to always fund and back the central government in Afghanistan. Ignoring Gant's observations and analysis of the war in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. may have cost tens of thousands of Afghans their lives. The Taliban of today is a byproduct of the CIA and Saudi funded mujahideen from the 1980's. After the defeat of soviet forces in 1988, Islamic radicalization flourished in Afghanistan and Pakistan. By 1991 the mujahideen in Afghanistan began fighting for power while destroying much of the country. The Taliban rose up in the mid-1990's imposing Sharia law and strict restrictions against women and traditional education. In 1996, with financial backing from Saudi Arabia, the Taliban seized Kabul. In 1998, Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network bombed two U.S Embassy buildings in Kenya and Tanzania. While the bombings were not an ideological aspiration for the Taliban in Afghanistan, the ancient Pushtun hospitality codes dictated bin Laden's protection in Afghanistan, and so the Taliban's fate was now linked with al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. During a 1999 *Newsweek* magazine's interview with Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, he foreshadowed much of what was to come for America:

Newsweek: What is your status in Afghanistan, and what is your relationship with the Taliban?

Bin Laden: We support the Taliban, and we consider ourselves part of them...

For us, there is only one government in Afghanistan. It is the Taliban government. We obey all its orders. Afghanistan was the place where we buried the Soviet Union, and it will be the place to bury the Americans for their designs on Muslims.

While America's strategy has wandered in the Middle East for decades, Osama bin Laden stayed on his message to further deny Western strategic goals for the upcoming centuries. With Bin Laden focused on America's global military presence, recently declassified memos from then Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld state, "I have no visibility on who the bad guys are in Afghanistan or Iraq... We are woefully deficient in human intelligence". (Insert New Quote) While Sec. Rumsfeld struggled to define the enemy in 2003, a 2015 interview of retired U.S Army lieutenant general Douglas Lute, a former U.S ambassador to NATO, and White House war czar for Afghanistan from 2007-2013 admitted in his SIGAR interview that, "We were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan, We didn't know what we were doing." He is not the only senior military officer who is confused. Had general Lute asked Major Gant what the issues were, he may have had an idea of what he was doing. Hundreds of SIGAR interviews point to the same misunderstanding of America's strategy in the Middle East.

When the Tribal Engagement Team (TET) is devoid of a "fundamental understanding of Afghanistan" they die, and the tribesmen risk being killed or worse by the Taliban. In Afghanistan, the tribes protect themselves independent of the Afghan

central government security forces. Gant refers to this as a “bottom-up” approach, or one in which the century old tribal systems can provide security for the society without the need for any corrupt Afghan national forces. By working intimately with these tribes, Americans forge relationships, while generating useful human intelligence (HUMINT), and then implement effective tactical strategies against the Taliban. TET’s can also use and allocate resources more effectively than the current top down agencies interviewed by SIGARS.

It should not come as a surprise that a Special Forces officer like Gant might formulate a plan before his deployment, he knows men will be counting on him with their lives. What is also not surprising, is the efforts by the U.S government to manipulate data to deceive the American public about the lack of progress during the U.S led invasion of Afghanistan. It is shameful, and disrespectful to the troops deployed into wars to lie about what is being done to win. These campaigns of deception are dangerous, and have been recently exposed by the Washington Post in the 2019 article, *At War With the Truth*, based on a tenacious reporter's request for records under the Freedom of Information Act. The previously classified interviews contained in the SIGAR report point to the most disturbing is the conclusion. A conclusion that White House staffer, and retired US Navy SEAL Jeffery Eggers shares in his interview. The conclusion that Osama bin Laden might be “laughing in his watery grave considering how much we spent on Afghanistan”.

A peace deal with the Taliban is an attempt by the executive branch to conceal and control the narrative about losing. The bottom line for America and Major Gant was

he had too many bosses, and far too many administrative regulations for his plan to work in the long run. Perhaps his TES was too unconventional for even Army Special Forces, and could have been better adapted by another NATO partner like Britain, who already had experience in losing wars to the tribes in Afghanistan. A very small percentage of Americans can name a single U.S service member who died in this war, and even fewer can name any Afghans who gave their lives fighting for a better country. Many questions should be asked by SIGAR in the future relating as to why the Pentagon failed to support Major Jim Gant, aka Lawrence of Afghanistan, when he needed it most. While American public will never remember the rules Jim Gant broke about painting Spartan symbols on Humvees, or what tribe gets gasoline or ammunition, but Americans should always remember the freedoms and people for whom he fought for in Afghanistan.

Point Three- TES would lead to the successful implementation of security, and much needed prosperity for the people of Afghanistan.

As T.E Lawrence did in Arabia, Gant strongly advocates for working with the tribes in Afghanistan. Unfortunately for the citizens of the United States, and the people of Afghanistan, many of Gant's immediate superiors wanted him to fail to discredit his achievements and promote their own careers. Credit should be given to U.S General David Petraeus, Commander of U.S Central Command (USCENTCOM) from October 13, 2008 to June 30, 2010 for believing and supporting Jim Gant and his tribe. In

American Spartan, Ann Scott Tyson describes the day when General Petraeus visited the Pashtun tribe in the village of Mangwel where Jim Gant had joined with tribal forces to fight the Taliban. On this day, Petraeus learned firsthand that the schools and clinic were open, and that Gant had a plan for expanding tribal engagement into the tribal areas of Pakistan. According to Tyson, Petraeus said:

“In places especially like those out in Konar- where you have very remote areas, very rugged terrain, limited numbers of coalition and Afghan forces- local security initiatives are the ultimate solution for those areas,” he said. “That’s how you keep the extremists, the Taliban, Al Qaeda, the TTP, whomever it may be, from establishing safe havens in those areas from which they attack Afghanistan and go back to Pakistan.” (209)

For General Petraeus, TES was a winning strategy in Afghanistan, but politically the U.S and NATO were far too invested in the corrupt Afghan central government. Gant argued this point to Petraeus in 2010, urging him to realize that “Any program that relies on the success of the Afghan government will fail. Any program that relies on the success of ANSF will fail.” (210). That same day, Gant was awarded the Joint Service Commendation Medal by Petraeus. Twenty-six months later the U.S Army would strip Major Gant of his Special Forces tab, demote him to the rank of Captain and force him into retirement.

The lingering effects of ignoring Gant’s advice in Afghanistan in 2010 became lasting, and resulted in the negotiations of a backroom peace deal with the Taliban in 2020. This forfeit will demand an explanation as to whether or not the sacrifices made by U.S troops to create a government in Afghanistan are to have been worth it. Was Gant's administrative infractions, and alcohol use worth losing a war over?

Unconventional strategies like TES, and the personnel who accomplish it must be afforded some leeway during war. Any unwillingness to commit fully to the TES in Afghanistan proved America lacked commitment to a competent strategy, This is now clearly pointed out in the 2019 SIGAR reports published by the *Washington Post*.

In terms of capacity for violence, The United States of America is not a country to be underestimated by any nation, dictator, tribe or warlord. When U.S policy makers have the desire to kill other human beings, America has the most lethal force ever devised to execute those desires, but when the same leadership lacks the vision to deal with the consequences America gets quagmires, stalemates, or outright defeats like the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Conclusion

President Donald Trump has signed a secret peace treaty with the Taliban in Afghanistan, and it appears that the U.S will reduce force levels well into spring of 2020. The tensions between the Afghan government, the Taliban, and ethnic tribes will most likely end in even more violence for the region. Had America simply diverted more resources over a longer period of a time to a tribal engagement strategy, the Taliban would not be in such a favorable position to negotiate and assume power. Moreover, had the United States military supported its own officers like Gant, then the tribes in

Afghanistan would not need a central Afghan government for protection in the first place. That government, whose armed forces will no longer have the American military to support it, will crumble under the Taliban. TES in Afghanistan was a cost effective and competent strategy given the specifics of the conflict.

While military strategies like TES are always complex and difficult to execute, Special Forces soldiers like Jim Gant are the best example that the Department of Defense (DoD) will need to incentivize this type of work in the future, and prioritize the recruitment and retainment of soldiers like Gant for future conflicts. Since a successful TES will typically require a ten year commitment or more, this may require an unorthodox approach to hiring and paying U.S soldiers much more than the current military pay structure allows. One proposal might be for soldiers who establish a working relationship with a tribe, and gain a stable foot hold in that Area of Operations (AO), to be given a ten-year contract to remain in the country and create and execute a winning formula. Because the task is so arduous, the signing bonuses for this type of work would have to be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars per U.S soldier. Upon completion of mission objectives, even more bonuses could be awarded directly into their Federal Thrift Savings Plans (TSP), or other retirement schemes. This gives U.S personnel the cash upfront to take care of their families back home, and the long-term incentives to achieve the TES missions required. Compared to the hundreds of billions of dollars wasted in Afghanistan, a few millions of dollars to recruit and retain the best and brightest U.S soldiers who can win asymmetric conflicts seems reasonable. America can win long-term conflicts with the correct personnel approach to the situation.

While professional athletes in America make millions of dollars per year, the soldiers who participated in Gant's TES of 2010-2012 all made well under \$100,000 a year. Standing up to the terrorists of this world should not be a short-term strategy, nor a low paying job. In addition to the military force being marginalized strategically by policy makers, America's military has now compartmentalized its force into thousands of office cubicles, sending millions of emails and powerpoints around the globe. And while this can be a useful component into the DoD's infrastructure for administration functions, it also has the power to take precedence over war fighting and bogs down war fighters. Oftentimes the modern war fighter on the ground, making the difference between life or death, winning or losing, is ignored, marginalized or disciplined for minor infractions of the administrative system, and that is a win for the enemy. When Major Gant is disciplined for giving gasoline to his tribe to fight the Taliban instead of the corrupt Afghan National Police (ANP) that is a failure of the men and women in military offices to understand and evaluate the real time, real world situation. These administrative functions work at incredibly efficient levels when it comes to punitive action for service members, but never work when the war fighters need any actual support. This type of system is not only counterproductive for U.S interest, but it's dangerous to the soldiers risking their lives for the mission.

Eventually, the soldiers who survive must return home, and begin the process of living life with the experiences of war. The US policies in Afghanistan have caused death and destruction without any political objectives accomplished. The people of Afghanistan will be worse off until a true Tribal Engagement Strategy is implemented in

the future. We now owe them what was originally promised by President Bush “That we will not waver; we will not tire; we will not falter; and we will not fail. Peace and freedom will prevail.” nineteen years later, America has failed to deliver on this promise.

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