
COP, COIN, and Afghanistan

By Lieutenant Colonel Florentino Santana

During North Atlantic Treaty Organization offensive operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, provincial residents asked International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops not to turn their area responsibilities over to the Afghan National Police (ANP) because of a fear of police corruption. The residents were so fearful of the ANP that they actually preferred Taliban rule.

This situation presents a problem for ISAF counter-insurgency (COIN) operations in Afghanistan. Policing can be an effective COIN tool. According to Field Manual (FM) 3-24, police are the most visible institution of the government's response to an insurgency. Police are—or at least should be—able to determine the individual needs of a community and address each constituency's concerns. In theory, this enhances the government's legitimacy.

Families, tribes, and ethnic identities are the cornerstone of Afghan society. This is due to the rugged geography that results in the presence of autonomous villages throughout the country. "Afghans identify themselves by *Qawm*—the basic subnational identity based on kinship, residence, and sometimes occupation. This instinctive social cohesiveness includes tribal clans, ethnic subgroups, religious sects, locality-based groups, and groups united by interests."¹

In Afghan culture, social control mechanisms are organized at the local level. The real Afghan social and political powers also reside at the local level. Therefore, policing is a local issue for Afghans, and police development should occur at that level. The central government should establish the conditions necessary to allow the concerns of the populace to be addressed within the communities. Community-oriented policing (COP) is a policing philosophy that is compatible with COIN theory and ISAF strategy. The COP model can assist the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in establishing the conditions necessary for local communities to address local problems. The legitimacy of the Afghan government depends upon its ability to accomplish that objective. The legitimacy of the central government facilitates the accomplishment of ISAF and U.S. strategic objectives in Afghanistan. Therefore, ISAF should place the highest

priority on police training and development. Police are members of the government agency that is closest to the people, and they can serve as a communication conduit between the people, local government, and central government.

Under the COP philosophy, the community is placed at the center of crime prevention. The components of COP are—

- **Strategic-oriented policing (SOP).** Police surge and use directed, aggressive, and saturation patrols to *clear* the criminal element from the community. They then *hold* that effort as they transition to the next phase.
- **Neighborhood-oriented policing (NOP).** NOP, which can be considered the second phase of implementation, can actually occur simultaneously with SOP. This is the heart of COP. For NOP to work, the community must be more than an ally or partner in the fight against crime; it must be at the head of the organization to which police are responsible and accountable. Communities with police *build* mechanisms to identify and prioritize problems. Examples of NOP programs include communication programs, community social control programs, community patrols, and community crime prevention.²
- **Problem-oriented policing (POP).** POP is a concept of effectiveness in policing. "Problem-oriented policing addresses a particular problem, analyzes the problem, determines a course of action, implements the program, then follows up in an evaluative manner. If the problem is resolved, the police and community must only keep the problem in check. If it is not resolved, alternative solutions are generated and implemented."³

Although COP and POP philosophies were developed separately over the same period of time, the implementation

of COP requires the implementation of POP. Police departments are just one of the many agencies responsible for improving the quality of life in a community. “The goal . . . is for police and community to work together in solving those particular problems that cannot be solved by traditional police work and need special attention for their resolution by developing a tailor-made response for the particular problem and situation.”⁴ Police officers team up with the community to form a broad, problem-solving partnership. The chief of police serves as an advocate for the community, sets the tone for the delivery of law enforcement services and multiagency responses to criminal and noncriminal quality-of-life issues, and ensures that organizational values remain ever present in the minds of the officers.

“The primary COIN objective is to enable local institutions. Therefore, supporting the police is essential.”⁵ With COP, police are instrumental in supporting the community by identifying problems at the most local level possible. In essence, the police become the conduit by which other government agencies address quality-of-life issues throughout the community. Therefore, the COP philosophy supports COIN operations not only in the security line of operation, but also in terms of all logical lines of operations (LLO).⁶ Police provide civil security while also assisting with the delivery of other essential services, as determined by the community. The people engage in continuous, positive interaction with the government through the police. This leads to economic development and the legitimacy of government.

COP is compatible with the “clear, hold, and build” strategy outlined in the current ISAF campaign plan. As ISAF develops the ANP capability to secure Afghanistan, defeat terrorism, and neutralize the insurgency, an effective police force is critical to the security line of operation. ISAF should assist Afghan National Security Forces to *clear* areas of enemy control, *hold* areas free from enemy control by ensuring that they remain under the control of a peaceful Afghan government with adequate security presence, and *build* the ANP and capacity of local institutions. The ANP should concentrate on solving community problems and becoming a conduit between the people and the government.

COP demonstrates that policing is COIN; there is no separation between the two. Police are not low-cost trigger pullers; they are part of the development of governance and criminal justice. Social control in Afghan society resides at the local level, and policing is a local issue. Local police departments can be tied to a national system through legal and training standards and funding.

Police should train police. The Military Police Corps should be the proponent for police transition team training certification requirements. Reserve Component units should consist of civilian police officers who have been deployed for this specific mission. The number of contracted police trainers should be increased. If the implementation of a police program is limited to the national level, ISAF should enlist countries with national programs (especially Muslim countries) to provide police trainers.

Endnotes:

¹*The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, Russian General Staff, translated and edited by Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress, University Press of Kansas, 2002.

²Willard M. Oliver, *Community-Oriented Policing: A Systematic Approach to Policing*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, March 2007.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 15 December 2006, p. 6-19.

⁶“Commanders use LLOs to visualize, describe, and direct operations when positional reference to enemy forces has little relevance. LLOs are appropriate for synchronizing operations against enemies that hide among the populace. A plan based on LLOs unifies the efforts of joint, interagency, multinational, and [host nation] forces toward a common purpose.” FM 3-24, p. 5-3.

References:

Robert R. Friedman, *Community Policing: Comparative Perspective and Prospects*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1992.

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