



CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders Headed to Afghanistan

From: Company Commanders of Task Force Lethal Warrior (2-12 IN, 4/4 ID)

Facilitating Development and Governance In Kunar Province

Success in the counterinsurgency fight requires us to operate along multiple lines of effort. It's not enough to be solely great warfighters; any security gains we achieve will be short-lived unless accompanied by economic and political progress that reduces the appeal of the insurgents. Although we as Army leaders are very well-trained to win the kinetic fight, we tend to be much less prepared for the challenges of achieving our desired economic and political effects in our areas of operations.

The company commanders of Task Force Lethal Warrior have been fully engaged in COIN (counterin-

surgency) in Afghanistan for the past nine months. Their mission has been to work with the Afghan security forces and civilian leaders to separate the insurgents from the people and to connect the people to their government. These leaders have learned some hard lessons and gained some great insights—knowledge they want to pass on to you. Listen in as these currently deployed commanders share their experiences of facilitating economic development and political governance in and around the Pech River Valley, Kunar Province.

Tim Eastman

CDR, D/2-12 IN

COP Michigan, Dara-I-Pech District

The process for managing development projects has improved a lot since I've been here. When my unit first arrived, we did things as previous units here had; we allowed locals to bring their project requests directly to the COP [combat outpost]. We would decide whether or not to approve a project, and then we'd make a contract and fund it. That had unintended undesirable effects: The process created mini-power brokers among the Afghans who "worked the system"; it wasn't transparent and didn't reduce corruption; and overall it undermined the legitimacy of the Afghan government. Why deal with your own government when the

Americans provide what you need?

Thanks to some great work by the USAID [U.S. Agency for International Development] rep who works at battalion headquarters, we are now using a development process that links the Afghan people with their government. Here's how it works. The elders of the local villages start the process by gathering for *shuras* called community development councils (CDCs). The elders hash things out among themselves and prioritize their project requests, which they then deliver to me. As long as their proposals make sense (e.g., they aren't asking for a water well to be drilled on an elder's personal property, nor for more solar-powered lights that tend to quickly disappear from the village and then reappear on the black market), I approve the list and forward it for consideration at the district development council (DDC). In American terms, think of a CDC as a town council and a DDC as a county council. Each CDC elects one of its elders to also serve and vote on the DDC. The DDC is hosted by government officials—the district sub-governor and his line directors. At the



Afghan government officials and civilians meet with U.S. advisors to develop a plan to procure furniture for the Dara-I-Pech District Center in Kunar Province.



CPT Andy White patrols in the Dara-I-Pech District town of Nangalam, second-largest population center in Kunar Province.

DDC, the local government officials and the representatives of the communities discuss and hash out a prioritized project list. Once again, since we're funding these projects, we monitor the process and give the list a common sense check. The DDC-approved projects from my AO [area of operations] are then returned to me for implementation. The large projects are handled by the PRT [provincial reconstruction team]. We contract out with locals and then do QA/QC [quality assurance/quality control] on the smaller (less than \$10,000) projects. This process works because it engages the Afghans' traditional form of authority and leadership—the system of elders—to operate seamlessly with the Afghan national government, in a way that all see as fair and productive.

The project-selection process is an example of doing things in ways that are consistent with Afghan culture. Afghan culture is very traditional. The people here are influenced heavily by *pashtunwali*, the customary code of honor that goes back thousands of years. *Pashtunwali* can be frustrating, as when a friendly village provides medical care and protection to a wounded Taliban, but we can also work within *pashtunwali* to make it work for us. For example, a lot of times when we can't come to an agreement with elders on something, we can utilize some of their principles, such as agreeing and disagreeing at the same time, or finding refuge in group approval rather than individual agreements. Another example of leveraging *pashtunwali* is that every time we want

to enter a village, we first ask the elders to invite us in, and, once there, we sit down with them for a cup of tea. This basically binds the elders to guarantee our security.

Andy White

CDR, HHC/2-12 IN

FOB Blessing, Dara-I-Pech District

My company is responsible for facilitating development projects and governance in the battlespace right around FOB [forward operating base] Blessing. This area consists primarily of three towns—Manogai, Shalotai and Nangalam. Nangalam is actually the second-largest population center in Kunar Province; it has a bazaar with more than 350 stalls. Along with our partner ANA [Afghan national army] company that lives with us here on the FOB, we conduct daily joint patrols of the bazaar and surrounding villages to maintain security that sets the conditions for economic and political development.

We see our role as facilitating connections between the people and their legitimate government. The people are represented by the villages' elders. The government is represented by the line directors of the Dara-I-Pech district government. There are line directors for agriculture, electricity, water, roads and the like. We are coaching the elders to develop a system for identifying and prioritizing their development requests to the government, and we're working with the government leaders to meet with, listen to and respond to the needs of their people in a manner that is fair and transparent. We are funding the projects, of course, as the Afghan government does not currently have the financial means to meet the development needs of its people.

One project that I'm particularly proud of involved acquiring tables and chairs for the district center. The district center is the place where the local Afghan government works on a daily basis, and it needed furniture. In this case, the request came directly from the government, so there was no need for a *shura*. We received the request for tables and



CPT Shaun Conlin (center) and LTC Brian Pearl meet with elders of the Watapur Valley. LTC Pearl wears his outer tactical vest to express displeasure at having been ambushed en route to the meeting.



CPT Conlin patrols the mountains overlooking the Watapur Valley, where his company's combat outposts lie along the Pech River.

sages. U.S. forces are taking a back seat as the Afghans take over the messaging, and that is great—it's what we want. The format of the station includes a lot of call-in shows. A show will ask, for example, "Do you think the sub-governor is doing a good job?" The listeners' calls provide us valuable feedback on what the people think of the security situation and their government. The locals' comments to Afghan talk-show hosts are probably more honest than what they say to us when we stop to talk with them during patrols. We're seeing an increase in both the number of listener responses and the percentage of responses that are positive toward the government, which I see as positive metrics in an environment where it's difficult to collect tangible metrics.

Kevin Hutcheson

CDR, A/2-12 IN

Operating in Chapa Dara District

We need to be sensitive to the fact that we are asking the people here to adopt some of our ways—things like the rule of law, transparency in government and even our weapons systems—and that requires a level of trust. Afghans need to believe that we understand and respect them and their culture. No one wants to emulate someone who doesn't respect them.

Little things can send big messages. When we first arrived here, we were on a patrol walking through fields. I reminded my Soldiers, "If you had busted your butt for weeks plowing a field and planting your crops, how would you feel if some guy

Shaun Conlin

CDR, C/2-12 IN

COP Honaker-Miracle, Watapur District

Our battalion operates a radio station. Coalition forces have distributed thousands of solar-powered radios so we can transmit messages directly to the people to counteract Taliban propaganda, which is spread by word-of-mouth. Our battalion area covers several valleys, and each valley is unique. My company's AO is the Watapur Valley, which often has IO [information operations] requirements that are different from those needed in other valleys. I kept bothering the battalion IO officer to put out messages specific to the Watapur, so battalion eventually decided just to give me my own radio station.

A three-soldier PSYOPS [psychological operations] team established the radio station, and we hired an Afghan contractor to develop and run the programming. In the beginning, I worked with the PSYOPS team to develop and refine our own messages, but we increasingly collaborated with my ANA counterpart; now he is heavily involved and has largely taken over the messaging. The ANA commander goes on the air all the time to explain what the ANA is doing and to disseminate other messages to the people. Every morning, the ANA *mullah* gives his call to prayer over the radio, and now he has started recruiting many of the local *mullahs* to come to the station and air their religious mes-



CPT Kevin Hutcheson speaks with Haji Wazir Gul, the head of shura for the lower Waygul Valley in Dara-I-Pech.



On a village patrol in the Korengal Valley, CPT Mark Moretti identifies possible enemy locations for his fire-support officer, 1LT Chris Owens (left), and 1LT Derek Knapp (center).

from another country came through and stepped on them when he could have easily avoided them? You'd be pissed off, right? Don't be 'that guy.'" It's really the Golden Rule—treat the people the way you'd like to be treated if you were in their shoes. For example, when we are in the United States, we don't walk over someone's grave unless we have to; it's a matter of respect. We owe Afghans the same respect when we patrol in and around their (clearly marked) cemeteries. One always has to take the Afghan culture into consideration here; might doesn't always make right. Just because we have bigger and more technological weapons than they do doesn't mean that we can come in and trample on 3,000 years of tradition, and it shouldn't surprise us when they fight to preserve their customs. The majority of the people here are poor, and their customs are all they have; they will protect them.

There are some matters of respect that are unique to the culture. For example, it's rude to walk in front of someone who is praying toward Mecca. That's not something I learned growing up; that's something I learned here from my interpreter. Our interpreters are great sources of knowledge about the culture. I recommend any unit coming into country to seek out their best interpreter and have him give you a class on local customs and traditions (because they are different in different regions of the country). Remember, these interpreters are not just here to translate for us. They understand that they are cultural advisors as well. Listening to them, in most cases, will save our Soldiers not only time and frustration, but possibly their lives.

Mark Moretti

CDR, B/2-12 IN

Korengal Outpost, Dara-I-Pech District

The Korengalis view themselves as separate from everybody else. I don't think they see themselves as part of the na-

tion of Afghanistan. They speak their own language. They want nothing to do with and have nothing to do with anyone outside of the valley. Given that baseline, I knew it would be a challenge to connect the people here with the government.

My plan coming in was to patrol aggressively to push the Taliban farther back into the hills, thus separating the people from the Taliban so we could connect the people to the government through development projects. We have patrolled very aggressively—more than 600 dismounted patrols so far, more than 200 firefights, some 2,000 fire missions—but the Taliban still has influence. The reasons are twofold. First, even though we patrol aggressively and maintain five outposts, we cannot be everywhere all the time; the Taliban can always return at night and threaten those who work with us. Second, the people here have an incestuous relationship with the Taliban. I may be speaking to an elder whose brother or son is a fighter. He's not going to give me information that is going to enable me to kill his family member.

Early in the deployment, we built a health clinic and worked on other projects, but we didn't get the cooperation we needed in terms of security. Once we concluded that the Korengali elders were not willing to stand up to the Taliban and engage with the government of Afghanistan, we ceased all funding for development projects. My men have done incredible work to give the people in the Korengal Valley an opportunity, but the people have to be willing to help themselves.

Every province, every district and every valley in Afghanistan is unique. The Center for Company-level Leaders has recently launched an initiative to create a geographically based "continuity file" to connect company commanders and platoon leaders who have served or will serve in Afghanistan. The information will be organized by Afghan province and district. If you are willing to contribute, please contact robert.c.stanton@us.army.mil or brett.w.martin@us.army.mil.

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Art by Jody Harmon

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