

## **TARGETING A WARLORD**

### **The Challenges of Effects-Based Information Operations in Afghanistan**

Recently, Afghanistan has had a violent complex history with an eleven-year war against the Russians from 1979 to 1989 followed by a communist regime from 1989-1992 and finally a civil war from 1989-1996. Since 1996, the country has endured the Taliban regime until 2001 when it was ousted by the Coalition forces. In fact, the instability which Afghanistan has experienced can be extended beyond the last 23 years and stretched back over 150 years, when the British Empire attempted to control the country. Still, Afghanistan has managed to survive against superior enemies and to develop its own unique methods of struggling against conventional and unconventional forces.

The cruel and unforgiving terrain of Afghanistan has also been a constant challenge to both the Afghans themselves and the occupying armies in the pursuit of normal existence. The present drought has lasted more than six years and left its mark on the lives of normal Afghans. Afghanistan is one of the poorest nations in the world. Present indicators may lead us to believe that Afghanistan is now progressing towards a "Narcostate" as more than 50 % of its economy is based around the cultivation of the poppy and the production and trafficking of the resulting drug. Afghanistan was the world leader in the production of opium and heroin in 2004. This challenge is not only for the Afghans but also for the international community in combating the existing drug industry in this country. Most of the heroin consumed on the streets of Europe comes from Afghanistan. Both the warlords and the illegal militias primarily control the drug industry. To compound the problem, there are allegations of high-ranking officials within the Government and police also involved in this illicit business. There are persistent allegations that President's brother is involved with the drug trade (Walsh 2005).

To really understand Afghanistan and its nationals is a challenge for any foreigner. An Afghan overview paper prepared by NATO in Brussels and delivered to ISAF (International Security Assistance Force), stated:

What I would like to drive home first and foremost is that “*Things are not straightforward in Afghanistan*”. Things are not as simple as we’d like them to be, always more complex, intricate, with deeper layers of symbolism and significance. Just making sense of what is happening is very difficult, much less *why* things are happening the way they are. (Schwerzel 2004).

In Afghanistan, the use of persuasive methods by tribal leaders, ethnic leaders and criminals is a necessity of survival. In military terms this persuasive methodology of Afghan life can be considered as ‘targeting’. Targeting is the way Afghans have been doing business for years, trying to influence and dominate each other in order to control their environment. What has changed is the violence, or the lack of it, whereby peace (compared to the near Afghan history) is now the prevalent factor in a deprived country resurrecting itself after 23 years of war. Today ‘non-lethal targeting’ has become a more important tool in influencing people and actions than the use of physical force. In this country basic communications is dependent on face-to-face contact. The human contact factor is paramount in this society where the social structures of village elders and tribal connections are of utmost importance to local governance and rural survival.

Afghans have not only been subjected to internal influences but also external ones, such as those from Pakistan during the Taliban regime. Post Taliban, Afghans experienced external targeting by foreigners who attempted to establish and support Government of Afghanistan (GOA). In turn, the central Government began targeting the provinces in order to extend its power base into the four corners of the country.

Afghanistan has made good progress since the fall of the Taliban regime. The Afghan government has gradually redeveloped the institutions of state and programs have occurred outside the capital Kabul, which have had a stabilising result, such as the deployment of the newly established Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) into the Provinces. The International Community has assisted in the training and equipping of the ANA and the ANP. Millions of girls have returned to schools and universities, and many new schools have been reconstructed. Nearly 2000 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) work in order to improve the quality and standard of life in Afghanistan.

## 1. WARLORDISM, THE THREAT

Despite the fact that Afghanistan now has a new democratically elected President, an ethnically balanced Cabinet and relative peace, Afghans are continuing to suffer from serious instability factors. According to the Rule of Gun report, “throughout the country, militarised political factions – militias and remnants of past Afghan military forces who came into power in the wake of the Taliban’s defeat – continue to cement their hold on political power at the local level, using force, threats, and corruption to stifle more legitimate political activity and dominate the election process” (HRW 2004, 1).

In addition to Warlords, President Karzai has argued that the powerful narcotic drug industry poses one of the greatest threats to Afghanistan’s security. According to the President, unlike the war with the Soviet Union the fight against the drug lords and the industry as a whole is an internal fight. President Karzai declared a “holy war” against drugs, saying that the nation of Afghanistan “has to fight against the poppy like it fought against the Russians” (Karzai 2004). The third security threat often mentioned by the President is the plight of terrorism.

Surveys conducted during the summer 2004, indicate that the most important issue for the urban Afghan is the development of a stable and secure environment, which in turn will require the disbandment of illegal militias. The survey suggests that although the population is anxious about the economy, they recognise the fact that long-term stability depends on the Government of Afghanistan destroying the power base of the illegal militias and the Warlords. In contradiction to the views of the President, the survey revealed that the normal Afghan does not see the Afghan drug industry as a threat to their society. (i to i Research 2004, 3).

Warlords are responsible for many of the instability issues within Afghanistan. They are directly involved in arbitrary arrests, kidnapping, extortion, torture, and judicial killings of criminal suspects. The local warlords and their small armies have been implicated in sexual crimes against women, girls, and boys. Once accused the warlords resort to murder, illegal detention and forced displacement against their accusers. The warlords have also been accused of involvement in human trafficking issues. Their personnel have seized property from families and levied illegal taxes on the local population. According to the Human Rights Watch “in some remote areas, there are no real governmental structures or activity, only abuse and criminal enterprises by factions”. (HRW 2005, 241)

Most threats within Afghanistan are interdependent on each other and this produces its own unique difficulties when one tries to solve the associated security issues.

A Financial Times journalist outlined the problem facing both US and NATO forces when he described the military commanders possessing a “fear of regional Afghan warlords who control security in wide swathes of the country and frequently generate huge profits from the drug trade, could turn against the central government if poppy eradication is pushed too hard” (Spiegel 2005). However, the facts are somewhat different because militarily these warlords do not possess the capability to challenge the international military forces.

The problems and associated consequences of Afghan Warlordism do not only affect the security environment but also impact on all levels of Afghan society. A collapse in security may lead to a suspension of UN and NGO humanitarian operations, as experienced in city of Herat, when aid delivery and development schemes were impeded on September 2004.

The GOA with the support of the international community has tackled most of the security threats, including Warlordism. To counter such threats many different courses of action have been adopted, yet all chosen courses of actions are somewhat mutually interdependent. An example of this is the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programme, Heavy Weapons Cantonment (HWC) and the development of the Afghan security forces both ANA and ANP. The desired end state is a stable and secure Afghanistan with central Government control extended to all four corners of this nation.

## **2. INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT AND MEDIA CONTROL**

Afghanistan has never possessed an organised independent media. “The state of media in Afghanistan today is zero, it is minus zero”, said Ahmed Rashid, the famous writer and author of *Jihad and Taliban*, in 2002. During the Taliban regime most of Afghanistan’s information environment was destroyed and reduced to a sole radio station “Shariat”, only broadcasting verses of Koran. Veteran Afghan journalist Habiullah Rafie says that the Taliban’s “media development has been unparalleled in our history”. After the fall of the Taliban, the factional press dominated control of media information within the nation. This press group had strong links to the Northern Alliance. (Saddique 2005)

For most Afghans radio is the main source of news information, specifically in the remote areas. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that Afghanistan’s information network is dominated by a radio culture. Since the fall of Taliban in the end of 2001, however, increasing numbers of urban Afghans are buying televisions and satellite

dishes. Afghan's information environment is developing and offering choice to its consumers. According to the Internews Agency, in Kabul since Autumn 2004 there are now a total of seven radio stations.

Radio Kabul broadcasts in the morning and in the evening for a few hours. There is one newscast every hour covering international and local news. The newscasts are written at Bakhtar News Agency, the state news agency, and then recorded for broadcast. There are also two independent stations and a number of international radio broadcasters, including the BBC, Deutsche Welle, Voice of America, and Radio Free Afghanistan. (Internews 2005)

Afghanistan's governmental sponsored television station RTA in Kabul is on the air for several hours each evening. In late 2004, private television Tolou arrived on the scene, and was successful in taking the number one position amongst Afghans. There is also a wide variation of publications to be found in Afghanistan. In Kabul city alone, more than 200 print publications have been registered with the Ministry of Information and Culture.

There are still many challenges for the Afghan media landscape to overcome, old equipment, skilled workforce and investment in order to maintain pace with information activities. Other challenges include overcoming media censorship, although a press freedom bill was adopted in April 2002. This should have ended censorship and the ban on freedom of speech, which were in place during the reign of the Taliban.

Competing national and regional politicians present considerable problems for journalists: separate factions vie for power and sometimes use journalists as scapegoats or intimidate these journalists from expressing their ideas. Many publications stay away from politics out of fear from alienating a powerful body, whether it is national government, regional military or local warlord. In this atmosphere of uncertainty and fear, journalists found themselves censoring their own ideas to stay out of harm's way and outside the conflicts that rage between the unsettled and unfriendly factions that fight for power throughout the country. (Internews 2004)

In the Afghan information environment, it is extremely difficult to know what is true and untrue. Afghanistan has endured many years of persuasion through many channels including international, neighbouring countries, tribal, ethnicities and warlords. Surviving the wars has shaped the information environment. It belongs to Afghans' way of life where people make all kinds of "agreements" – in order to survive for another day. Another challenge for Afghanistan is the poor level of literacy. Afghanistan is a ripe environment for rumours.

### 3. GENERAL DOSTUM - A WARLORD OR A HERO?

General Abdur Rahim Dostum is one of the most dangerous and most colourful characters in recent Afghan military history. General Dostum is known to be ruthless and responsible for not only the murders of hundreds of Taliban but also his own people. He can be considered one of the few remaining Warlords, although he dislikes this title, with power and influence throughout his province. He prefers to be known as *Dostum* (your friend). General Dostum has many enemies who would like to see him dead. The most recent attack against him was on January 20<sup>th</sup> 2005 when one suicide bomber tried to assassinate him.

There are many stories about Dostum suggesting that he is running his own mini-state in the Northern Afghanistan. This claim may be exaggerated but there is no doubt that he is able to exercise considerable power in his own region and operates beyond the control of the central government. Dostum is well known to be brutal when required. Philp writes that the General

“frequently ordered public executions of criminals and opponents from other ethnic groups, many of whom were crushed to death under his Russian tanks. He was recently accused of allowing hundreds of Taliban prisoners to suffocate in containers, a charge he denies”. (Philp 2004)

Since the Presidential election in 2004, the government is determined to extend its power base beyond the limits of the large urban centres and into the far-reaching corners of the country's provinces. This in itself, if successful would diminish the control of Dostum, the warlord and the involvement of his army in illegal activity. Although Dostum was very heavily involved with the U.S. led coalition in fighting the Taliban, it did not prevent him from exercising his muscle with respect to his activities. The argument being that the U.S. actually supported the role of the warlord when it served their needs against the Taliban.

The other public perception of Dostum, is one of “a national hero” due to the fact that he waged a violent campaign against the Taliban and freed the people from this ruthless regime. Also in Sherberghan city itself, hometown of Dostum life is more prosperous compared to many other Afghan cities. It is suggested that the source for this prosperity is from Dostum's illegal activities such as drugs.

Dostum's skill in surviving the ever-changing security environment is evident as explained in the Afghan newspaper Anis when it stated, “Dostum proved to be very skilful in changing policies, defections, unions and coalitions”.

#### **4. GOA'S EFFORTS TO INFLUENCE WARLORDS**

After President Karzai was elected in 2002 as interim President, he began his term of office with the intention to expand the government's power beyond the influence of Kabul. The first step initiated by the President was to connect the warlords to the Government through political participation. As a consequence of this, in 2002 General Dostum was appointed as Deputy Minister of Defence and as presidential adviser on military and security issues in 2003.

During the Presidential election, the Non-Governmental Organization, Human Rights Watch attempted to influence the political arena by highlighting the Warlordism issue. In its paper it stated, "It would not have been difficult technically for the JEMB to make factual findings that some candidates, like General Dostum, Yunis Qanooni, Mohammad Mohaqqiq, and Karim Khalali, are de facto leaders of military forces, or are linked with such forces (HRW 2004, 6)". The NGO tried to isolate the Warlords from the political scene.

After the elections the President altered his tactics with respect to the warlords by tackling their authority head on. He fully supported the disarmament programme and heavy weapons collection, which were managed by the international community. The Minister of Defence, Rahim Wardak declared, "disarmament of militias loyal to regional warlords was going faster than planned" (Reuters 2005). As promised during the presidential campaign, Karzai dismissed one of the most famous warlords, Marshal Mohammad Qasim Fahim, a Tajik from Pansjir valley, from his post as Minister of Defence.

Human Rights Watch praised the President when another warlord Ismael Khan was marginalized from his provincial governmental post in Herat late 2004. This "raised hopes that President Karzai and the international community had begun to reverse their policy of relying on warlords to provide security" (HRW 2004, 241). The central Government wanted a governor in Herat whom they could trust and rely on to enforce their policies. At a later date the government was forced to make concession to Ismael Khan by appointing him as the Minister of Energy in the new Cabinet announced in December 2004.

President Karzai also changed course with respect to Gen Dostum in 2004 by isolating him from a possible position in the central Government. As such this resulted in the Uzbek's not having a representative in the Government. The supporters of Gen Dostum criticized the new cabinet's structure and said "Karzai's government safeguarded the interests of one ethnic group, the Pashtuns" (Erada 2005).

## 5. INFORMATION CONTROL IN NORTHERN AFGHANISTAN

The information environment in Afghanistan is widely manipulated by the warlords in order to directly influence the population in their areas. In Sherberghan city, which is the capital of Jowzjan province and the hometown of General Dostum, it is impossible to move anywhere in the city without noticing the image and face of Dostum. One of such painting portrays Dostum as the peacemaker declaring, "it is not time of Armour. Now it is time of knowledge, and we have to use pen".

Times journalist in London described the landscape of Sherberghan city with respect to General Dostum, as follows:

Posters of his burly, thick-browed face adorns every shop window and car windscreen across his dusty northern stronghold where countless Saddam-style painted portraits of the notorious Mujahidin commander gaze down on his people. Posters for any of the other 17 candidates running against him for the Afghan presidency are absent... (Philp 2004)

It is also speculated that with respect to the two television stations in Northern Afghanistan, particularly the AINA television in Sheberghan city, General Abdul Rashid Dostum privately funds them. The compound in which the TV station is housed, is owned by his brother, Qadir Dostum. Local sources say, that the equipment operated by the TV station is state-of-the art and worth hundreds of thousands U.S. dollars, a cost too high to be borne by two cousins without direct input from Dostum huge wealth. (Internews 2004, 7)

In the fight to control the media environment in a warlord's area, the independent journalist is singled out for intimidation and harassment for the warlord's supporters. Therefore, the warlord keeps a tight control on the regional and local media. The editor of Mazar-E Sharif's *Andesha-e-Naw* in Northern Afghanistan claims that the regional warlords have pressured him. The editor of *Kalak-e Rostgoi*, a monthly satirical newspaper also in Mazar-E Sharif says "The regional leaders, Mohammed Atta and Abdul Rashid Dostum... have threatened and harassed editors at his publication and others in the region". (Internews 2004, 6)

It is also difficult for the government-funded publications in Northern Afghanistan to establish a power base from which to operate. Ms. Sazawar, editor of *Bedar* in Mazar-e Sharif was issued a death threat because she published an article regarding the Rights of women in the *Jumbish*, a publication from Dostum's political party



"Jumbish-e Milli". This article also angered the local mullahs of the Jamit-E Islami Party, who oppose Dostum and his political aspirations. The Jamiat-E Islami party has also its own newspaper, *Fayad-e Qalam*, which is anti-Dostum. According to the Internews "The newspaper issued a fatwa declaring that Ms. Sazawar was a "kaffir" (infidel) and that she was the Salman Rushdie of Mazar-e Sharif, despite clarification and correction in *Jumbish*". (Internews 2004, 8)

## **6. WARLORD "PLAYING THE GAME"**

General Dostum understands the changing environment, and nominated himself as one of the Presidential candidates in the recent election. According to the journalist Philp, this raises the question as to "why the country's most notorious warlord is running for office and, indeed, why the authorities are allowing him to". Philp believed that by running, "General Dostum and other former Mujahidin commanders with similarly poor human rights records are seeking to legitimise themselves and win political capital to barter for future positions in power". The fact that no one can speak out against the warlord clearly illustrates that "the warlord culture that has plagued their country for nearly three decades" is not going to change, and is strong. (Philp 2004)

Gen Dostum is attempting to legitimise himself by creating a political shield. His political aspirations will counter those accusations and claims of warlordism against him. The World Report 2005 says "warlords and armed factions, including remaining Taliban forces, dominate most of the country and routinely abuse human rights, particularly rights of women and girls" (HRW 2005, 240) In his speech, General Dostum stated that he has "always tried to defend the people and country's interests", and also he declared during one of his presidential election speeches that, "I have never exploited the interests of my people and country". (Dostum 2004)

Dostum made it clear during his presidential campaign that he would improve two things if elected President. The first was the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration program (DDR) and the second was the Rights of women. In supporting the Rights of women, Dostum was attempting to camouflage the fact that he himself was suspected of crimes against such groups.

Surprisingly enough, during the Presidential election of autumn 2004, very few security or operational problems arose. One of the reasons for this was that people were willing to make change, and also international support was crucial. Yet it was still reported that political repression and coercion by the local warlords and fac-

tional leaders was evident. In many cases Afghans “were threatened by local leaders on how to vote. Independent political organizers unaffiliated with factions or their militia forces faced death threats and harassment and in many areas struggled just to organize” (HRW 2005, 243). General Dostum’s commanders “threatened local leaders to ensure that local populations voted as they commanded” but few dared speak out for fear of reprisal. “Everyone says they support Dostum in public,” the activist said. “In private they know he has done many criminal things ...really they despise him.” (HRW 2004, 23).

After the election, a NGO IWPR argued that;

Residents of northern area claim a local commander retaliated against them for voting for President Hamed Karzai. More than 200 villagers from rural areas in the northern province of Faryab have fled their homes and sought refuge in the city of Mazar-e-Sharif, claiming they have been persecuted by a local commander. The villagers say that after they voted for President Hamed Karzai in last October’s election, their homes were looted and they were subjected to extortion by Najib, a local commander. Najib supported defeated candidate General Abdul Rashid Dostum, whose support is strongest in northern Afghanistan. In addition, they claim that Najib has illegally imprisoned at least 20 of their children. (IWPR 2005)

Post elections, Gen Dostum argued and pushed for a high-ranking appointment in the Cabinet. He personally sought the position of Chief of Defence, which he expected due to the fact that he received nearly 10 million votes, mostly from Uzbeks in the Northern region. However, President Karzai used his “isolation” tactics, and he refused to appoint Dostum.

Dostum tried to influence Karzai through the U.S. Ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad. According to a local newspaper there was a lot of bargaining taking place with the U.S. Ambassador acting as a messenger between both parties.

Members of Jonbesh Millie Islami, a party led by Abdul Rashid Dostum in a gathering in Jowzjan province told Zalmay Khalilzad, that Uzbek ethnic group is not represented in the central government, and Dostum has to be given a ministerial post. In reply, Khalilzad said that selection of ministers is the right of the Afghan President and added that the U.S. will build a hydroelectric station in Jowzjan at a cost of \$US 100m. (Erada 2005)

A future hydroelectric station will most probably not satisfy Gen Dostum aspirations to attain political power. In an attempt to soften Dostum's anger the President did offer him a ministry post in the new cabinet, but Dostum refused because he wanted a more influential role in the Government and one that could have some effect on Afghanistan, either Ministry of Defence or Chief of Defence Forces.

## **7. ISAF'S NON-LETHAL TARGETING**

ISAF's mission and role is to support the government of Afghanistan in establishing the rule of law in Afghanistan. ISAF main task is to maintain a secure environment in its area of operations (AOO), which includes Kabul and the Northern Provinces of Afghanistan. It is in this region that General Dostum's power base exists. ISAF operates in the Northern provinces through Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). ISAF has had a successful 2004, whereby the first ever-Presidential elections took place in a relatively peaceful environment. ISAF also played a significant role in assisting the UN and the GOA with their election information campaign, which resulted in almost 80% of those eligible to vote actually voting. It is interesting that the Human Rights Watch claimed that "the international community has failed to contribute adequate troops or resources to address the situation", specifically outside Kabul (HRW 2004, 240). It is worthwhile recognizing what the Commander of ISAF (COMISAF), General Py told the press in 2004, "ISAF's mission is to support the central government. This is not a fighting mission. We are forces for self-defence of the PRTs. And what we do there is we support the governor, the local governor, the chief of police and their people, in order to increase the security locally". General Py adds when discussing the problem of drugs cultivation and trafficking in Afghanistan, that "ISAF supports changing the attitudes of people because you might know that a lot of local people are sometimes corrupted into this trafficking". (NATO 2004)

Therefore, non-lethal targeting is one of the many ways ISAF achieves its desired effects. Non-lethal targeting is a way for ISAF to influence specific individuals on a military operational level. In order to influence the security environment, ISAF has variety of information means available such as psychological operations (PSYOPS), public information activities and finally force posture. Information operations are not solely limited to targeting but it is still a very important process.

ISAF's non-lethal targeting is focused on effects-based interdisciplinary systematic procedures. One of the most important issues in this process is to understand the Go-

vernment of Afghanistan's objectives, capabilities, intentions and the ISAF mission itself. The key to this operation is to generate the desired effects necessary in order to achieve COMISAF's objectives and at the same time avoid unintentional effects.

Gen Dostum is one of many important targets itemised on ISAF's effects lists. Dostum is a key target due to his activities and is critical to ISAF's mission and the Government's goals in Northern Afghanistan as he is a very influential individual in determining the security environment in his area. Typically, there are two effects ISAF attempts to achieve and they are to *inform and influence* their intended target.

The desired effect of informing with respect to Gen Dostum is to make him aware of new government's politics and ISAF's intentions to support these policies within the security area such as disarmament, building security institutions, and with counter narcotics.

The effect of influencing Dostum is a more difficult task in which ISAF is trying to achieve. With respect to the security situation and Dostum's political activities ISAF does not hide the fact that they are monitoring him. This in itself is one of the most important tasks for non-lethal targeting process. ISAF intelligence units and the British-led Provincial Reconstruction Team in Mazar-e Sharif execute this. It is also crucial that Dostum's is a target of information operations, which is achieved through COMISAF himself, ISAF generals and the local PRT commander in their meetings with Dostum. The objective of these information operations is to support a safe and secure environment.

One of the challenges in effecting a warlord is to implement the correct methods against him with information operations. The Supreme Commander of NATO forces, General James Jones clarifies this by saying "if you pull at the thread of counter-narcotics the wrong way, because of the sheer proportion of the gross domestic product wrapped up in this business, you should be careful of unintended consequences". Using non-lethal targeting in a balanced way in a fragile security environment where ISAF are supporting the GOA is a challenge. This dilemma raises critics for those who want to act directly. "Military's rules of engagement should not allow soldiers to ignore poppy-growing, as they widely do at present", writes the Financial Times journalist. (Spiegel 2005)

Another challenge for ISAF is to evaluate and measure the effects. It is not so important to evaluate that ISAF is achieving their effects but rather to try and determine how to measure the qualitative factors, for example how successfully has ISAF influenced Dostum. Gen Dostum is skilful in the art of propaganda and as he basically controls the media in his "area of responsibility" he has a free run of what message he

wants to disseminate to his local community. Dostum still does not hold any official position in Afghanistan yet his Jumbesh party, which has not been officially recognized, is a powerful political entity in Northern Afghanistan. During a meeting with Gen Dostum in Mazar-e Sharif with the British PRT Commander, the atmosphere was friendly and understanding. Jowzjan Television quoted the PRT commander saying as follows in local language:

“We praise you, Gen Abdorrashid Dostum, a presidential candidate for the forthcoming elections, for your efforts aimed at strengthening everlasting peace and stability in all parts of Afghanistan. You are an outstanding and well-known political individual in Afghanistan. You have played a vital and active role in addressing all the important issues in Afghanistan. Your role and part were effective and noticeable in addressing all the problems and causing the collapse of the Al-Qa’idah regime and the terrorist network in Afghanistan. Nations worldwide are aware of your role,” (Jowzjan TV 2004)

Also the PRT commander were quoted saying,

“We discerned your faithful feelings and interest in maintaining peace and stability and implementing law and democracy in the country. At the same time there are a number of notorious and aggressive individuals in the north who want to create tension and damage peace and security in peaceful regions in the north, as if they were supported by a number of officials from the central government. We are seriously against such movements, and this is like playing with fire.” (Jowzjan TV 2004)

It is evident from the comments of the meeting that ISAF role is more poised towards influence and persuasion techniques in the information environment than actually fighting a military campaign. Gen Dostum is well aware of ISAF’s reputation among local Afghans, and this raises the question of the achieved effects of such a meeting as an information operation. Dostum himself is aware of ISAF’s support for the government. The intention of the meeting looking from the ISAF perspective is that ISAF will exchange information. Dostum was informed about ISAF’s mission priorities (inform effect) and Dostum was influenced not to rely on violence as a

means of doing “business”. The achievement of effects with Dostum is questionable when you refer to reports by the Human Rights Watch that more than 50% of complaints of human rights abuses and violations made are against General Dostum.

Many complained that he had clearly violated the law, forbidding candidates from maintaining a private militia. Human rights groups and election monitors say he is one of four warlord candidates who should have been disqualified. That they were not is a disturbing precedent. “The Government shouldn’t have let them stand at all,” said Saeed Mohammed, of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. “But these people haven’t been disarmed yet. If they had been refused as candidates, they may have caused more problems.” (Philp 2004)

Another question worth evaluating is the benefit of these meetings for ISAF, GOA, Dostum or local people. Initially, Karzai wanted to link Gen Dostum to his political campaign but Dostum decided to stand against Karzai in the Presidential election. The view from local Television was that Dostum was recognized publicly as an important person and a key player in Northern Afghanistan. For ISAF tactical level operations, ISAF achieved its desired objective in the short-term by having Dostum ‘inside the tent rather than outside’ and therefore he is influenced through information operations as opposed to using military force.

It was productive to have Dostum part of the democratic Presidential election as participation alone publicly indicated his support for the democratic process. Not all effects, such as psychological outcomes can be seen in the public information environment. Therefore, effects of information operations must be measured, not against the fact that the meeting took place, but amongst the local population and how they interpret the security environment in Northern Afghanistan. It is also interesting to ask how ISAF increases their deterrence posture if the security situation deteriorates in Northern Afghanistan.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

ISAF’s non-lethal targeting process in theory is very focused yet in practice it is complex and cumbersome to implement. Non-lethal targeting within the framework of information operations is itself an effects-based operation, which incorporates activities in political, military, economic, social and information environments. The fact that is not too much emphasized, is the one that specifically information environment is a different kind of environment to operate than the traditional military environment.

Secondly, information operations are an interdisciplinary way of influencing. ISAF's non-lethal targeting highlights the importance of synchronizing effects on the political, economic, social and military operational level and not solely within military level. This is an ideal but challenging objective due to the political and economic environment in Afghanistan. Therefore, centralized and coherent influence efforts from the Government are nearly impossible to fulfil in a complex security environment where there is no strong central government. Also interdisciplinary coordination is challenging due to the same reasons but it is slightly more structured due to the presence of willing international actors such as U.K. Embassy, U.S. Embassy, US-led Coalition Forces and NATO forces. Still both internal and external factors such as foreign interests and local tribal and ethnic interests determine the process of political influencing and military operational targeting.

The Warlords are targets of the Japanese-led DDR process, which attempts to remove the illegal militias and replace them with the ANA. They are also targets of law enforcement agencies attempting to destroy the criminal infrastructure. There is a GOA policy of trying to persuade them to cease all illegal activities such as narcotics. If this kind of targeting bases itself on stovepipe thinking without determining the possible effects from areas other than those that you are primarily responsible for then the whole military operational level targeting process may suffer from unintentional damage. Achieving the correct balance in targeting by finding the appropriate methods of influencing is a delegate operation. It is a constant challenge to keep the warlords involved in dialogue yet at the same time persuading them to cease all criminal activities. It is possible to break the vicious cycle of illegal power structures with strong actions such as eradication of poppy fields but there is a possibility that with such actions one could further deteriorate the issue if farmers do not receive alternative livelihoods and consequently as a result of a limited supply of opium the price increases.

One of the lessons of ISAF's effects-based information operations, is that the way of life in Afghanistan must be structured into all action plans in order to achieve success. That is the challenge for the operational planning how to think and know about Afghan way of life – as headquarters' planners change in every six months. Supporting democracy in Afghanistan is different than western countries. E.g. in Afghanistan Islam is one of the most important elements influencing way of life in Afghan society. Also, different concept can be understood differently in Afghanistan. E.g. President Karzai tried to explain to a journalist the Afghan way for democracy, which supported the idea of involving warlords rather than isolating them.

We can easily implement democracy in Afghanistan because all our tribes and all our civil institutions agree to and support the democratization process. In fact, we are very famous for our traditional style of life. Our people in villages and rural areas resolve their disputes and make decisions through national councils. Community elders and religious scholars give them advice and counseling. Most of the Afghan people live in rural areas and villages. They have enjoyed a democratic way of life for centuries. (Eslah 2005)

ISAF's targeting actions are very sensitive to issues that can have wider effects such as political and are not under the sole influence of ISAF. Therefore information operations assessments are more important in this complex environment for international military forces. At the same time they are more and more difficult to make.

Credible information operations require a new kind of thinking; effects-based planning, execution and assessment inside whole military headquarters. Coordination with external actors is a crucial asset to the non-lethal targeting process in military forces. The main challenge with coordination is that all information assets are not in the hands of targeting actor as Gen Dostum has illustrated with the manipulation of the media landscape for his own benefit. Anyhow, the desired effects – as they are core in the targeting process and information operations – of targeting a warlord at both the political and military operational level have been achieved in Northern Afghanistan. The fact is that there is no ongoing open military conflict in existence. In the case of Gen Dostum, effects such as the modification of his behaviour, the disarmament of his personal militias and the entrance into the political arena have occurred. Still, some undesired effects have materialised in that the drug economy reached a peak in 2004. Northern Afghanistan needs to be monitored and influenced by the government of Afghanistan, international community, and military forces, and ideally co-ordinately targeted by them all, as there is lot of corruption, criminal activities and human abuses – been committed by the warlords. This is the challenge of coordination amongst the various actors. Therefore it is a challenge for effects-based information operations in the complex information environment, as information operations are more about coordination of information and effects than a traditional military capability.

*I would like to thank Colonel Daniel Thirion, Belgium Army and Major Niall O'Toole, Irish Army from ISAF VI for their valuable comments and friendship. Also I would like to thank professor Richard Andres, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies from the USAF Air*



*University for the feedback. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Finnish Defence Forces, ISAF, NATO, GOA, or any part of them or any individual mentioned in the article in any way.*

## References

- Dostum, A. R. (2004). "Presidential election candidate speech", *Presidential Candidate Dostum's Booklet*, Oct 2004.
- Erada (2005). "Supporters of Dostum criticize the cabinet structure", *Erada*, Jan 16, 2005.
- Eslah (2005). "Afghan President defends appointment of ministers", *Eslah*, Jan 12, 2005.
- HRW (2005). *Human Rights Watch World Report 2005. Events 2004*. Human Rights Watch.
- HRW (2004). "The Rule of Gun. Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in the Run-up to Afghanistan's Presidential Election", *A Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper*, Sept 2004.
- I to I Research Limited (2004). "Afghanistan Poll", *Research Report for Dis (Human Factors)*, Old War Office Building, London, July 15, 2004.
- Internews (2005). Afghanistan. Media Landscape. Available on <http://www.internews.org/regions/centralasia/afghanistan.htm>
- Internews (2004). "Media Freedom and Journalist Security", *Media Monitor*. A monthly newsletter on Afghan media, Feb 29, 2004.
- IWPR (2005). "Villagers Flee Intimidation", Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Jan 19, 2005.
- Jowzjan TV (2004). "Afghan northern leader meets British PRT chief", *Jowzjan TV*, Aug 27, 2004.
- Karzai, Hamid (2004). President Karzai's Speech on 9 Dec 2004 at the Presidential Palace, Kabul.
- NATO (2004). Nato Press Briefing by the Nato Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan, Hikmet Cetin, and Lieutenant General Jean-Louis Py, Commander, International Security Force, ISAF. Oct 27, 2004.
- Philp, Catherine (2004). "From a brutal warlord to "our hero of peace" - now he wants to be Afghanistan's president", *The Times*, Sept 30, 2004. Available on <http://www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/0/51da3ae2f5883a4287256f1f0045f5d9?OpenDocument&Click=>
- Reuters (2005). "Interview - Afghans trying to coax Taliban in from the cold", *Reuters News*, Jan 11, 2005.
- Rubin, Barnett (2002). *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*. Yale University Press.
- Saddique, Abubaker (2005). Afghanistan's Media Renaissance. *Newsline*, available on <http://www.newsline.com.pk/NewsJan2005/newsbeatjan2005.htm>
- Schwerzel, Jeffrey (2004). "ISAF Afghanistan Overview". Background handout paper, Jan 2004, NATO.
- Spiegel, Peter (2005). "Pentagon divided on role in Afghan drug trade crackdown", *The Financial Times*, Jan 2, 2005.
- Walsh, Declan (2005). Karzai victory plants seeds of hope in fight to kick Afghan opium habit. *The Guardian*, Jan 1. Available on <http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,1284,1381860,00.html>