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**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL
MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

THESIS

**BUYING INFLUENCE: THE RELATIONSHIP OF
INCENTIVES AND VALUES**

by

Michael T. Hutchinson

December 2014

Thesis Advisor:
Second Reader:

Michael Freeman
Scott Sigmund Gartner

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BUYING INFLUENCE: THE RELATIONSHIP OF INCENTIVES AND VALUES

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Major, United States Army
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
December 2014**

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ABSTRACT

Governments and their respective armed forces are in the business of influencing human behavior. Whether attempting to force compliance with a policy objective, enforce conformity to established norms, or convert a value system to match their own, political and military leaders employ a variety of covert and overt means to persuade a target audience to modify its behavior. Providing incentives, financial or otherwise, is one of the most prevalent means of influence, yet conventional wisdom holds that allies can be rented, but never bought. This thesis seeks to analyze whether human behavior can be reliably purchased, and if so, whether such a relationship can transcend bribed compliance. An analysis of prevailing economic and psychological theories suggests an interesting, dynamic relationship between incentives and intrinsic values—some scholars claiming that extrinsic reward is harmful to motivation, others suggesting the opposite. A case study of recent stability operations in Afghanistan highlights how incentives can reinforce a rapid transformation in intrinsic values. A series of vignettes contained within the case study suggests that intrinsic values are not as immutable as one might presume, and that extrinsic reward can rapidly transform them in a confused or fragmented system.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. TO LIVE AND DIE IN O.E. (THE CITY OF ORGUN-E), PAKTIKA PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN – SEPTEMBER, 2011

As he approached a small food stand beside the money exchange, Gul Babrai's youngest son likely focused on only one thing: honor. No one had paid him for what he was about to do. After all, his family was sufficiently wealthy. His pace quickened as he reached the cobblestone pavement of a narrow street lined with shops peddling sundry items. The oily smell of sizzling bargar sandwiches hung in the air, filling hundreds of passers-by with a sense of security. Gul Babrai's scouts were correct; Zakim Khan was dining alone, without even his usual bodyguard. It did not matter that Zakim was not currently commanding troops, nor did it matter that he ever had. This business was personal. Zakim Khan was not an ostentatious man. He had fought for the Americans with his ragtag militia early in the war, made his money, and no longer cared which side emerged victorious in Paktika. His days now consisted of sipping tea in the Orgun bazaar, where he discussed local politics and the battles of his erstwhile opponents. The once-feared commander was nothing but a figurehead in mid-2011; he controlled no political bloc or armed force. The days of informal, government-sanctioned warlords had ended. Zakim chose now to drink his tea with extra sugar, invite entertaining conversation, and keep a low profile.

My bargar—a greasy mix of fried potatoes, peppers, and boiled eggs wrapped in Afghan flatbread—carried more salt than the Dead Sea. Our party sat near the hospital entrance, across the street from Zakim's table, blissfully unaware of the latest political twist about to unfold in the bazaar. Zakim Khan had marginalized Gul Babrai's influence in the area several years before; we knew of Gul Babrai's current aspirations to challenge the district governor's legitimacy, and that Zakim Khan was again frustrating these efforts by siding with the governor's wealthy family. However, sometimes the simplest equations become muddied by perceptual errors. Seeing one of the most prominent citizens of Orgun riddled with bullets and slumped over an unfinished bowl of chukney provided me with a searing reminder that two plus two does indeed equal four. Zakim

Khan, hero of Operation Anaconda and numerous other engagements, was dead—not due to an extremist fatwa, but rather by order of his neighbor, Gul Babrai.

B. RATIONAL ACTORS?

Gul Babrai’s decision to assassinate Zakim Khan evokes a paradoxically simple and complex query: why do people think and act the way they do? Such a broad question touches on many disciplines and a multitude of approaches. Decision theory scholars claim that human behavior can be predicted, shaped, or even controlled under the right conditions.¹ The key to influence and control in all approaches lies in the use of incentives—called maximizing individuals’ “expected utility.”² Humans respond favorably to positive incentives, whether the reward is monetary in nature or simply a feeling of satisfaction.³ Logically, if incentive x produces behavior modification y , then human decision-making is essentially “rational” (that is purposeful) and incentives can “purchase” compliance (and thus lead people to make choices preferred by the influencer that maximize the targets’ expected utility). However, as many psychologists have noted, human action is not always logical and is not easily predicted.⁴ Furthermore, humans generally resent manipulation, sometimes to the point of active resistance.⁵ If expected utility clashes with intrinsic values within an uncertain environment, can behavior be reliably predicted or purchased?

Those looking to influence others (“influencers” altering “target” behavior) increase their chance of changing behavior if the incentive system they employ is designed to increase the target’s perception of agency (the human capacity to exercise

¹ Inspired by Selectorate Theory, Dr. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita proposes that a logarithm based on the rational self-interest of stakeholders can reveal future choices with high accuracy, thus allowing another party to test various strategies and engineer an outcome. For more information, see Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, *The Predictioneer’s Game* (New York: Random House, 2009).

² As first derived in an appendix to the second edition of John Von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern’s *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (Princeton, NJ: The Princeton University Press, 1947).

³ Albert Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 242.

⁴ Dan Ariely, *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 239.

⁵ Bandura, *Social Foundations*, 247.

control over thoughts, motivations, and actions to change themselves and their own situation through their own efforts).⁶ In practice, enhancing agency means enhancing a target's range of options and capacity to accomplish them; such an approach may seem counterproductive, should an influencer seek to engineer an outcome. The key element, therefore, is perception of control.

Perception is derived from a set of intrinsic values and the narrative which frames the situation. Consider the case of Zakim Khan's assassin: he fled the scene, running all the way to Ghazni City, some 200 kilometers away. Gul Babrai was summoned to meet with the elders and the District Council, in which he proclaimed that the killing was *badal*—an act of revenge—as sanctioned by the Pashtun code of ethics, an intrinsic system of values known as *Pashtunwali*. He knew that such a defense demanded retribution from Zakim Khan's family, which was an outcome that no one wished to realize. When, where, and how would the next cycle of revenge begin? Would it escalate beyond families to encompass entire clans? The *Tajik* and *Kharoti* tribal elders of eastern Paktika spoke in hushed tones.

Gul Babrai knew what was necessary to see the outcome he preferred. “*Nanawatai*,” he stated with resignation. He had invoked a second tenet of *Pashtunwali*, an act of contrition in which he would bind the two families together to avoid further bloodshed. In doing so, he effectively excommunicated his youngest son, exiling him indefinitely. Zakim Khan's family was obliged to accept the offer, as was the council to approve it. Had Gul Babrai chosen to “bribe” the victim's family with one hundred goats as compensation, they would likely have accepted the offer, waited a period of time, and then killed the most vulnerable member of the offending family, sparking a new round of killings and goat exchanges. Instead, the narrative which accompanied this social transaction reinforced communal norms and values, significantly lowering the probability of renegeing.

A social transaction begins with one step which precipitates a series of predictable actions; patterns of thought and action in a target audience are of obvious value to those

⁶ Albert Bandura, “Human Agency in Social Cognitive Theory,” *American Psychologist* 44, no. 9 (September 1989): 1175.

seeking influence over others. A study of stability operations conducted in Afghanistan's Paktika Province (see Figure 1) from 2010 to 2012 illustrates how an incentive plan focused on enhancing perceived agency can "purchase" reliable behavior, provided the influencer conducts the transactions appropriately. Not unlike the steps of a social transaction, a proper incentive plan with appropriate transactions is, essentially, a dance.

II. PAKTIKA PROVINCE, 2010–2012: A CASE STUDY IN DECISION MAKING UNDER SEVERE UNCERTAINTY

A. THE HARSH, PASHTUN COTILLION: A DANCE OF CONFLICT (SHKIN, PAKTIKA PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN, JANUARY 2010)

As our helicopter swooped downward in ever-shrinking circles, we surveyed the physical terrain that framed our problem. Small, primitive houses punctuated a landscape of hard-scrabble farm plots in the valley.⁷ A shuttered bazaar sat on the Pakistani border, with a rutted dirt road snaking westward into the snow-topped mountains of Paktika Province. We saw neither pedestrian nor vehicle traffic; this was a land of isolation and deprivation, hardly worth a fight, yet it had witnessed some of the conflict’s most pitched confrontations.

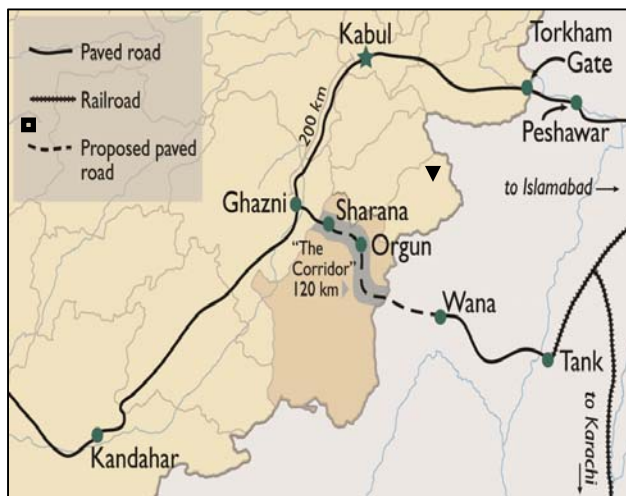


Figure 1. Area of Operations, Southeastern Afghanistan

Upon arrival, we met the infamous Commander Aziz. He was stocky with a thick, black beard, sporting a pressed set of modified fatigues in a black-and-green tiger stripe pattern. He wore a crisp, clean baseball cap with new Oakley sunglasses perched on the

⁷ This section is largely drawn from the author’s personal experience in Afghanistan from January 2010 to February 2012. The majority of the story, including additional details, can be found in MAJ Mike Hutchinson, “Building the Future: An Unlikely Coalition and a Road in Rural Afghanistan,” *CTX* 4, no. 3 (August 2014): 5–20.

brim. To say that Aziz—called *Karwan*, or “commander” by his soldiers and close allies—despised the Taliban is a gross understatement. He described in detail the predations of foreign fighters, his imprisonment in the 1990s, and near assassination in 2006. He outlined the enemy dispositions surrounding Shkin, from indirect fire positions to infiltration routes. Aziz saw himself as the gatekeeper. He protected the only “good” tribes of Paktika—those immediately surrounding his base—with a laser focus commensurate to his responsibility. However, in his eyes the responsibility ended at the borders of Bermel District. Through this limited perceptual lens, which essentially extended no further than the range of his after-market rifle optics, there was nothing beyond Shkin but the enemy, and his fellow Afghans were derelict in their duty to fight.

On the third day, we prepared for the first of what would eventually be several hundred *shuras* (gatherings of decision-makers) as partners.⁸ Mohammad Azzam sat nervously in the briefing room. Azzam was the district governor of Shkin, and as Shkin was not recognized by the central government in Kabul, neither was he.⁹ Aziz outlined the talking points for the meeting: reporting procedures for discovery of improvised explosive devices, theft of the Ahmadzai Waziri tribe’s commercial trucks by the Kharoti tribesmen in the village cluster of Rabat, and a religious appeal for Afghan patriotism. Azzam’s role, as usual, would be as the religious foil to Aziz’s iron fist. Finally, speaking, I asked Aziz “What should I say?” “Nothing,” he replied. “Not this time. I will introduce you, but that is all. Until you see the area and hear how the people argue, and see how the Pakistanis keep the fire burning, you might say the wrong thing.”

We walked through the main gate and to the *shura* building—a simple, plywood structure with a sand-filled blast wall on its east side to protect against rocket fragmentation. The wall had done its job; pockmarked from shrapnel and beginning to

⁸ A *shura* is traditionally a gathering of religious authorities to resolve a debate or grievance; however, in contemporary Pashtun parlance, it refers to any gathering of decision-makers to share information, debate the merits of potential actions, or settle disputes.

⁹ Shkin is a community that lies at the southern tip of Bermel district on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, and is officially recognized as part of Bermel district. Due to intertribal feuds and an increasingly strong alliance with Aziz and his base at Shkin, however, the local tribes decided that Shkin should be its own district. These tribes first forwarded the proposal to the central government in Kabul in 2008, but to the author’s best knowledge, it is still an unofficial district with an unofficial governor.

split at its seams, the barrier ensured that the building would soon collapse from rot and a leaky roof instead. The scene provided a perfect allegory for Aziz's protection of eastern Paktika Province. Aziz entered first, followed by Azzam, with me and my best interpreter in trail. We were the last to arrive, as is customary in these meetings. On the border, he with the most guns and money is most honored, and the simple tribes of Shkin were no match for our firepower and deep pockets. Our thrones were therefore the most intact of the plastic lawn chairs arrayed around the room.

Following the mullah's opening prayer, the script began. Sher Nawaz stood first. As the leader of the most powerful tribe, the Ahmadzai Waziri, it was his right. He was followed by the Banzai Kharoti leader, Mir Afzal. Azzam punctuated the series of monologues in a forceful, authoritative tone that seemed completely contradictory to his previously timid demeanor. It was as though he spent the course of each week hoarding his energy for a two-minute burst of emotion. I sat silently behind Aziz as my interpreter whispered the main points of this political theater. No debatable observations or inflammatory statements had emerged; it was no wonder the previous Special Forces team had praised the functioning local governance of Shkin, for despite its rustic trappings the *shura* might have been televised on CSPAN.

Before Aziz could conclude the meeting, a younger man stood up, pointed his finger at the Kharoti elders, and began to shout. A disgruntled murmur passed through the assembly, as I turned to my interpreter with a quizzical look. "That is Daria Khan, a Langikhel Kharoti from the town of Rabat," he stated. "He used to work for Aziz, but now he is just a thief and a trouble-maker. He is probably the one who stole the Waziri trucks." "What's he saying?" I asked in a clear tone, as the roar of the argument began to rise. "He says the elders in Rabat are all *Talibs* that pay money to Chamtu, a very bad guy. He wants to raise a force to fight the *Talibs* and says Aziz and the other Kharoti leaders need to support him." Aziz deftly defused the tension, adjourned the meeting, and led our contingent out of the building. My curiosity was piqued; addressing him by his title, I asked, "Tell me about Rabat, *Karwan*."

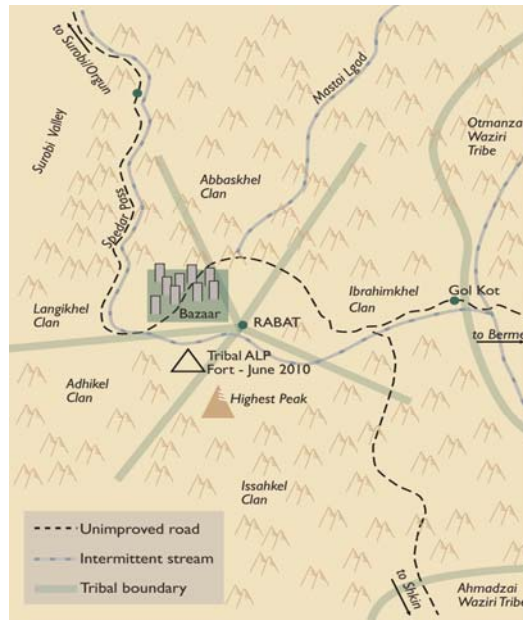


Figure 2. Depiction of Rabat Village and its Tribal Boundaries

A large, laminated map of eastern Paktika hung from a piece of $\frac{3}{4}$ " plywood in the briefing room. Aziz’s military map-reading skills were adequate to describe Rabat’s internal and external tribal conflicts, as well as its attractiveness as an insurgent facilitation hub and piracy mecca (see Figure 2). Five clans converged on a confluence of intermittent streams, which formed a small but permanent river; as the snowpack from the mountains melted in April, Rabat experienced an annual ravaging of flash floods, eroding their best plots of land. As the land shifted, so did the balance of power. The Issakhel and Langikhel were now competing for the orchards, as the Abbaskhel slowly encroached on grazing land from the north. To the east, the neighboring Otmanzai Waziri tribe maintained a shaky truce with the Kharoti in Rabat; the slightest provocation could ignite a tribal war.

Aziz traced the crumbling dirt road from the border at Shkin, northwest through Rabat, and then jabbed his finger forcefully on a narrow pass north of the town. “This is Spedar. It is the worst of places. Many ambushes—one of the 7th Group engineers was killed there a few years ago. Every time I go here, it is a fight.” “Why is it so important?” I asked. “There are other routes around further in the mountains.” “Those routes are hard to drive. The trucks might break. If the trucks break, the *talibs* will mine all the ways out

and it will cost us.” I wondered aloud, having seen the incredible ability of an Afghan to drive a low-riding Honda Civic over the roughest of passes, if it affected the large “Jingle” trucks which carried commercial supplies in the same manner. “It is possible, just like for us. But if they break it is expensive in time and money. That’s why they pay the toll in Spedar.” The toll was not only to the Taliban; as Chamtu’s group moved on to other camps and ambush sites, the tribesmen of Rabat took turns extorting any through-traffic. Aziz stated plainly that it was their best means of making money. “When can we go to Rabat? The team needs to see it firsthand.” Aziz quickly replied, “We can go tomorrow. We will summon the *Maliks*, the leaders of each clan, when we arrive. You will see how they act.”

The drive to Rabat, though only fifteen kilometers, took more than two hours. To call the route at that time a “road” is an insult to civil engineers worldwide. As we emerged from the mountains and descended towards the cluster of clan villages which composed the town, it appeared to be a dustbowl. However, as we dismounted our vehicles and proceeded on foot along the flanks of the convoy, we travelled through the most lush greenery and orchards we had seen so far. This land was indeed worth fighting over. We entered the Rabat bazaar, a shanty town of closed mud huts, by way of a circuitous path which revealed a defaced and abandoned elementary school. Numerous crumbling masonry culverts and dams dotted the route. Our interpreter noted our surprise at the engineering attempt, stating “CARE International put them here when the Taliban was in charge. But they are hollow like this place now.”

We entered the lone tea house situated beside the lone auto shop, which was adjacent to the lone pharmacy. Even the mosque seemed decrepit. The *maliks* of Rabat slowly arrived, and our interpreter provided me with a hushed biography of each as they entered. “That is Malik Asgrar. He is the biggest *talib* here. Malik Bengal is an ok guy, but he is afraid,” and so on. When Malik Abdul entered the room, all rose, including Aziz. Apparently, he was the man upon whose opinion the sentiment of the town turned. I shook his hand in the ritualistic manner, and as he proceeded to his seat beside Aziz, the invocation of the mullah began.

We discussed Chamtu and his Taliban operatives, the theft of Waziri trucks, the extortion of commercial traffic – all the sins of Rabat’s clans. Malik Asgrar countered each point as it was posed. Aziz’s patience began to falter; he stated, “Security is my responsibility. If you do not side with the government and stop supporting the *talibs*, I will be back, and it will not be for tea.” Asgrar sat silently this time with a determined glare. “What are we to do?” asked Malik Abdul. “It is fine to say the government supports us, but who will get here first? This matter is not about supporting the Taliban, it is about our survival. Even if we stand, we will be weakened, and when we are weakened the Otmanzai will come. Perhaps they will come with the Ahmadzai as well. The Banzai are safe by your base, but there are no bases here.” As we left the tea house and the elders dispersed to their respective villages, I spotted Daria Khan. “What can we do to change things here? What will convince the elders?” Without hesitation, he responded. “Kill Chamtu.”

B. MOTIVATION AND HUMAN AGENCY

Robustness, in decision theory, refers to a decision’s degree of immunity to uncertainty.¹⁰ In other words, a robust decision is one that has accounted for its vulnerabilities and mitigated these risks to the highest degree possible, given a severe amount of uncertainty. Robust decision-making (RDM) is an analytic framework employed by the RAND Corporation to aid clients in analyzing strategy and policy under similar uncertain conditions.¹¹ Given the historical decision-making pattern of the aforementioned elders, an equally-explanatory acronym might have been “Rabat Decision-Making.” Decades of war and deprivation had robbed Rabat, as well as the rest of Paktika, of any measure of certainty, and their decision-making patterns reflected the confusion. If the elders had no idea who would provide the next higher level of governance next month, what the crops would yield, if a flash flood would kill their

¹⁰ Yakov Ben-Haim, *Info-Gap Decision Theory: Decisions Under Severe Uncertainty*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Elsevier, Ltd., 2006), 42.

¹¹ “Robust Decision-Making,” last modified November 12, 2014, <http://www.rand.org/topics/robust-decision-making.html>.

children, if the Otmanzai would invade, if the Americans and their proxies would start caring, or worse, start raiding—what were they to do?

The elders chose to be as robust as possible, which meant theft, graft, hoarding, and violent deterrence. In effect, they were a model of Info-Gap Theory in a Hobbesian landscape.¹² They roughly estimated what outcome their strategy would produce, and then added an increasing level of safeguards to ensure that a realistic worst-case scenario would not topple the fragile social order. Rabat’s conservative strategy was designed to prevent a catastrophe, but never to exploit a windfall. But why would they consider a windfall? What windfalls had they experienced, or observed among their neighbors? It is likely that they viewed an optimistic strategist suggesting the potential for a grand opportunity as a snake oil salesman.

The environmental context of Rabat in early 2010 surely did not provide cause for optimism. Within the village, the most powerful clan, the Langikhel, sought to maintain the status quo. Meanwhile, the Abbaskhel subtly took advantage of the Langikhel’s orchard dispute to seize additional grazing land. Looking externally, all of Rabat’s clans suspected that their eastern neighbor, the powerful Otmanzai tribe, intended to annex the Gol Kot watershed area (see Figure 3). Given Rabat’s internal divisions, the only buffer against such an encroachment was Chamtu’s Taliban group.

¹² Info-Gap Theory is a framework for dealing with decisions under severe uncertainty; developed by Israeli scholar Yakov Ben-Haim, Info-Gap theory distinguishes itself from Bayesian analysis through a non-probabilistic function. Much like RDM, Info-Gap seeks to address severe uncertainty by reversing Expected Utility Theory’s “predict then act” framework by focusing first on strategic vulnerabilities, then on developing mixed or expanded strategic options to address these vulnerabilities by preparing to survive a worst-case scenario or exploit an opportune windfall. Courses of action are based on estimates which are admittedly prone to be far from the intended mark, which has prompted some criticism. For more on Info-Gap Theory, see Ben-Haim, *Info-Gap Decision Theory: Decisions Under Severe Uncertainty*, cited above. For more on its primary criticism, see Moshe Sniedovich, “Fooled by Local Robustness,” *Risk Analysis* 32, no. 10 (October 2012): 1630–1637, DOI: 10.1111/j.1539-6924.2011.01772.x.

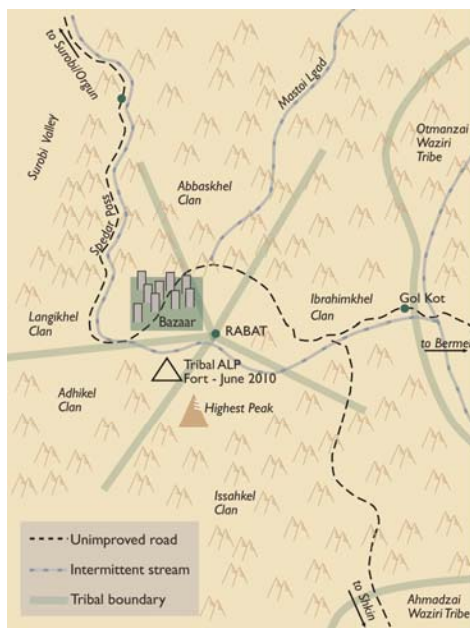


Figure 3. Depiction of Otmanzai Tribal Boundary Adjacent to Rabat Village

To deter the Otmanzai without Chamtu’s intervention, Rabat would need to improve its military and economic position relative to this adversary. This goal would prove problematic. Only a unified set of clans could muster the required number of fighting men to hold the ground in the short term. Worse, from a long-term economic perspective the town was a proverbial island. Its clansmen were not welcome in Otmanzai territory, nor were they able to open new ventures further west in Surobi District. The only available economic opportunities were in Rabat proper, but its native population could not sustain more businesses and the town was considered a den of thieves by commercial travelers. It must have seemed to the elders of Rabat as though they were slaves to their environment. The elders provided an excellent example of actor-observer asymmetry; their potential actions and realized decisions were constrained, in their opinion, by external factors beyond their control, which partially explains their tendency towards robust decision-making.¹³

¹³ Edward E. Jones and Richard.E. Nisbett, *The Actor and the Observer: Divergent Perceptions of the Causes of Behavior* (New York: General Learning Press, 1971), 80.

From an observer's point of view, humans may have as much of an effect on their environment as it exerts upon them.¹⁴ Whether it is the creation or maintenance of a system of authority, investment in a technology which can ease one's burden of labor, or a decision to pick up litter, humans possess some degree of capacity to change their circumstances through purposeful action, or "agency."¹⁵ This degree of agency is contingent upon numerous factors, but it nonetheless exists. Sanctions can influence one's perception of capacity, as Chamtu's implied threat of execution no doubt weighed upon the elders' decision-making, yet exercise of agency and fear of sanctions are both motivated by the cognitive capacity for forethought.

Forethought, on its own, can provide strong incentive or disincentive for action based on previous experiences; however, combined with the cognitive capacity for symbolism and reflexive thought, humans are capable of generating new, innovative ideas and acting upon them.¹⁶ The primary constraint of this capacity is resources. One may be able to envision a superior product, but without the access required to sell a product, or the financial means to generate a prototype, an idea will not be realized.

The fundamental conclusion is that humans desire and seek the ability to act as causal agents within their environmental context, and this pursuit is a prime motivator of behavior.¹⁷ Accumulation of resources, at its core, is an attempt to increase an individual or group's degree of agency. In simpler terms, humans desire to be masters of their own destiny. The perception of efficacy in realizing this outcome, however, is often an obstacle.¹⁸ A neighbor may demonstrate a path to achieve a desired outcome, yet if the observer does not believe he possesses the requisite skills or capacity to emulate it, he

¹⁴ The reciprocal causality of environment and human behavior is well documented; for a social realist perspective; see Margaret S. Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 2004), 258, for a Social Cognitive Theory treatment, see Albert Bandura, "Human Agency in Social Cognitive Theory," *American Psychologist* 44, no. 9 (September 1989): 1180.

¹⁵ Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, "What is Agency?" *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 4 (January 1998): 963.

¹⁶ Bandura, "Human Agency in Social Cognitive Theory," 1180.

¹⁷ Alfred R. Mele, *Motivation and Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 38.

¹⁸ Bandura, *Social Foundations*, 391.

may persist in apathetic or counterproductive behavior. In these cases, intervention may be required.

Rabat was not alone in its perceived powerlessness; every town and village in the region suffered from the same psychological despair. After thirty years of war, no one had observed a path to prosperity and its associated causal agency. Moreover, even had they visualized a path, no group could succeed on its own. External intervention was necessary. However, if purely external forces provided the glue that binds the enterprise, the effort would undoubtedly collapse at the first absence of these forces.¹⁹ Killing Chamtu would be necessary but not sufficient to produce a sustainable outcome. The team needed to convince Rabat and other villages of their own agency and efficacy, and to set conditions which would make them believe they were masters of their own destiny.

In our operations center in Shkin, the team debated what was to be done. Spring had not yet arrived, and we had used the winter months to visit the majority of the communities, witnessing the same passive acceptance of poverty and Taliban psychological control in each. A correlating scene of abandoned bazaars, crumbling infrastructure, and failing crops throughout the valleys provided a visual context of this hopelessness. Most families reluctantly sent at least one son to join the Taliban ranks, while also sending a son to the government security forces, both to hedge their bets for the uncertain aftermath and to glean what little income they could.

Arriving in country in January, we expected to continue the previous strategy in Shkin—strengthen control of the border. This approach matched Aziz’s perception of the security situation, the desire of the supportive Shkin tribes, and even the doctrine forwarded by the Army’s field manual on counterinsurgency. However, given the political shift in our headquarters to support the nascent Village Stability Operations (VSO) mission, and the debate in Kabul over the proposed Afghan Local Police (ALP) program, we knew we would soon receive a change of mission.

¹⁹ Gordon H. McCormick , Steven B. Horton, and Lauren A. Harrison, “Things Fall Apart: TheEndgame Dynamics of Internal Wars,” *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2007): 335.

As we scribbled notes and graphics on a six-foot-square map of the region, and glanced at maps of water relief and graphics of population density, a subtle outline emerged from our military map. I drew the boundaries of a corridor running from Karachi, Pakistan to the Ring Road highway in Ghazni. “This is where the people are, and this is where the chance for profit is. From the port at Karachi, north by rail to South Waziristan, then by road to Kabul and Kandahar, and it all cuts right through here (see Figure 4). If we open a secure economic corridor, the people will profit and they’ll be motivated to protect their investment.” The intelligence sergeant chimed in, feverishly drawing circles on the map, “there’s a lot of potential, but we’ll have hard sells in Rabat and Surobi just to reach the hub in Orgun. And even if we convince Rabat, we’ll have to secure Spedar before we can do anything else.” He continued by highlighting the points of political pressure we could use to sway Rabat.

Our resident politician on the team, a staff sergeant who was once a local elected official in Massachusetts, noted that political maneuvering could produce verbal and written commitments, but behavioral commitment was a step further. “They need to believe that the profit will come, and they need to believe it’ll stay after we leave. We can’t just secure the corridor, we need to pave it. At that point, they’ll be so invested they’ll have to fight for it.” Other team members noted that in the “Money as a Weapons System–Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)” document, as well as our discussions with development organizations and the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), no appetite for road paving existed.²⁰ The intelligence sergeant retorted, “if we secure the route and the Afghans clearly rise up against the *talibs*, and all that the people want in return is asphalt, the headquarters in Kabul will have no choice but to finish the road they started in the provincial capital, Sharana. If we build it, they will come.”

²⁰ United States Forces – Afghanistan, “Money As A Weapons System – Afghanistan: Commander’s Emergency Relief Program (CERP) SOP,” USFOR-A Publication 1–06 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Forces – Afghanistan, December 2009), accessed from [http://www.usma.edu/cnrtd/siteassets/sitepages/government%20publications/maaws-a%20usfor-a%20cerp%20sop%20\(dec2009\).pdf](http://www.usma.edu/cnrtd/siteassets/sitepages/government%20publications/maaws-a%20usfor-a%20cerp%20sop%20(dec2009).pdf).

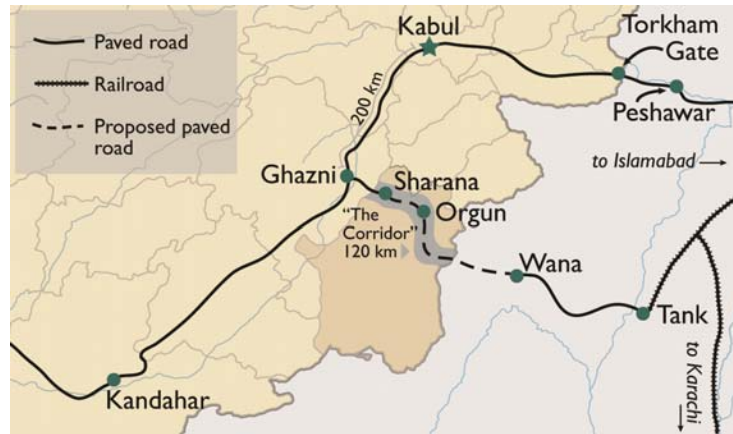


Figure 4. Proposed Economic Corridor Through Paktika Province, Afghanistan

I sat quietly for a moment, considering what the team had proposed. “We’ll never sell this to the tribes in our words. We need Afghans to sell it for us. To convince the salesmen, we’ll need to inspire them. We’ll tell them they’re going to create a new Torkham Gate, without Kabul, without the Americans.²¹ They’ll build it, and they’ll own it. MAAWS-A is for dollars. This profit will be in *Rupees*.”²² The most aggressive member of the team, which is quite an honorific given his peers in the circle, stated the final point of the strategy plainly. “I love your theory, but these people respect strength. That’s why they respect the *talibs*. Tell me where we get to fight someone to inspire the buy-in for the grand plan.” All eyes turned to a tiny point on the map: Spedar.

Aziz’s assertions that every trip through the Spedar Pass resulted in a fight were not entirely accurate. When dismounted forces cleared the high ground which flanked the road prior to convoy arrival, the trip involved nothing beyond discovering improvised explosive devices. If we were to provoke an engagement, we needed to be vulnerable. Aziz dispatched two of his most adept mine-spotters dressed in full Taliban garb through the pass on local motorcycles a half-hour before our arrival. As we neared the northern end of the pass, the ambush began. After several minutes, the firing had ceased. We did

²¹ Torkham Gate is the primary economic entry point to eastern Afghanistan, located in Nangarhar Province.

²² The Pakistani Rupee is the dominant form of cash in southeastern Afghanistan, and is more valuable and trusted than the domestic Afghani currency. My statement reflects a belief that an open, secure road would provide enduring economic benefit regardless of the presence of foreign troops and cash.

not attempt to immediately pursue the *talibs*, but slowly crested the western high ground on foot. Eight of Chamtu's men were dead, although he was not among them.

We met again with the *maliks*, and Aziz pressured them for support. "Why are you afraid of Chamtu? We beat him easily, and you have hundreds more men." "You beat him this time, but he is still alive, and now he is surely angry," Malik Bengal retorted. "If he thinks we support you, he will come at night to our houses, not fight us in the pass." Clearly, a comparison of available firepower would not sway them. I whispered in Aziz's ear, "Tell them about your plan." Aziz nodded, continued with his normal line of discussion, and once clear of the perception that I had influenced his words, he channeled his inner Socrates. "Malik Abdul, how many Jingle trucks come through here each week?" "Maybe a dozen, sometimes more," Abdul replied. Aziz noted, "But a hundred reach the bazaar in Orgun each week, and this is the shortest route from Wana." Abdul was not immediately convinced, stating "True, but the route from Gomal is smoother, so they can make up the time." The series of questions continued until the seed was planted. If the route was secure and free of tolls, and the road was in good condition, more trucks would come. If the town was secure, the trucks would prefer to stop in Rabat rather than in Surobi. An influx of trucks and weary travelers required more shops, service stations, and even hotels. Malik Abdul's expression betrayed his agreement, although his words remained resolute. Rabat would not side against Chamtu.

We left the meeting, and as we approached the southeastern turn towards Shkin, Aziz's ICOM radio crackled. A Taliban assassination cell had attempted to reach the house of Sher Nawaz. Not to fear, Aziz reassured us; the Ahmadzai trapped them and killed them all. The route through the Bermel *wadi* (valley) to the east was faster, although much less secure, and our vehicles raced through the tree-lined washout to meet the victorious tribesmen. The inventory of seized equipment suggested that this was a highly specialized team of killers. Aziz took the four bodies to the Bermel District Center for repatriation or burial, after which we returned to Shkin. As I sat in the operations center that evening writing my daily report, I knew that a crystal ball was not necessary to see our future; in short order, we would be re-missioned as a VSO team. Our headquarters would expect us to ally with the Ahmadzai, but in our mind the tribe was

merely the foothold—we needed another *shura* in Shkin, and we needed Rabat’s *maliks* to be there.

C. RABAT’S CHANGING ALLEGIANCE

The preparation for the *shura* between Shkin and Rabat was intensive. We held several preliminary meetings with the Shkin elders, collectively and individually. Azzam jotted copious notes, eventually producing a draft agreement of Rabat’s unequivocal support to the Afghan government. It was Aziz’s idea to produce formal, written agreements signed and sealed in thumbprint. He explained to us that culturally, the agreement would deny the signatories the ability to provide financial or material support to the insurgency. It would not change private attitudes, but it would provide a framework free of elder meddling in which to recruit the young people into a local defense force, traditionally referred to as *chalwesti* in the region. Every Shkin elder memorized his role in the script and his key talking points. We were confident that given enough collective pressure, the *maliks*’ only remaining argument would be a lack of defensive fortifications in the community. We began coordinating for the materials and heavy equipment required. We would build it, and they would come.

The tribes’ and team’s combined preparations appear to have worked; in less than two hours, the stunned *maliks* of Rabat emerged from Azzam’s office. The nervous group returned north under Aziz’s escort to the village, and sent word to Chamtu. It read simply, “You cannot come to Rabat. We have an agreement with the government. We have no choice.” Several days later, we received word that a delegation from Chamtu had indeed arrived, sat with the elders, and the message was reiterated. That night, several rocket-propelled grenades struck the wall of Malik Abdul’s house. No one was hurt; Daria Khan arrived with a dozen heavily armed men to stand guard until dawn. Rabat was committed, albeit reluctantly. The onus was now on the team to find Chamtu.

For two weeks we neglected our normal routines, *shuras*, and patrols. Chamtu was the only goal. Aziz and the team repositioned to Orgun to shorten our response time to Rabat. We received additional resources from our chain of command to aid in the search, but still had not found our white whale. His group attacked the Surobi District

Center with mortar fire, prompting another patrol. Aziz was clearly frustrated, as were the members of the team. “I’m not feeling well today,” he told me. “My deputy Faqir will lead the patrol.” The news further demoralized the team. Faqir lacked Aziz’s competence and leadership skills, and had a volatile personality. “Alright Aziz, we’ll tell you what we find,” I grudgingly replied.

In short order, Faqir took a wrong turn and we found ourselves drifting aimlessly through ominous mountain passes in the Taliban stronghold of Charbaran (see Figure 5). Our attempts to guide Faqir back to the valley were failing, and finally our interpreter passed him the message “turn east at the next pass and keep going.” He obliged, and we found ourselves cresting the mountains through a dense alpine forest. As we descended towards the village of Nawi Kalay, we were relieved that, if nothing else, we were heading in the right direction. The forest continued to thin; my Humvee was third in line as we reached the tree line. I heard an excited shout from my gunner. My eyes shifted to the left, tracing the turn of his turret, and widened as I met a similar gaze from Chamtu’s entire force, perhaps seventy-five meters away and comfortably encamped. No orders were given; our convoy wheeled left and accelerated.

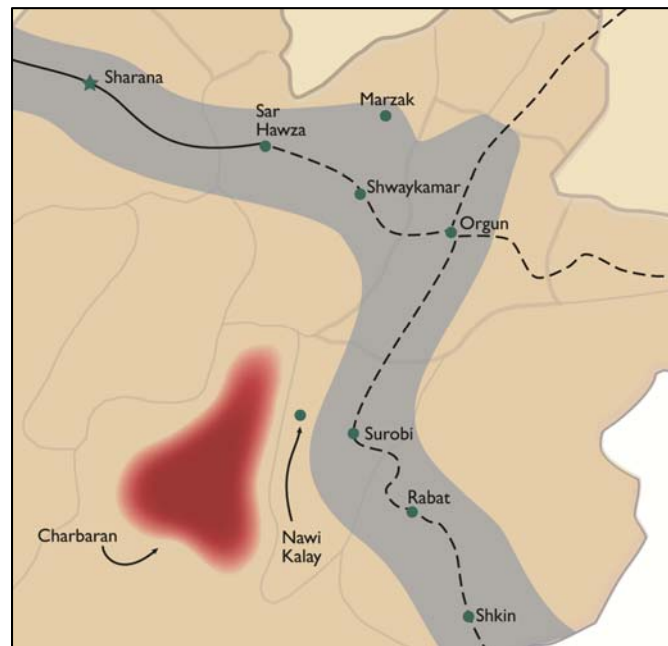


Figure 5. The Taliban Safe Haven of Charbaran

The rapid thump of heavy machine guns and staccato blare of every light weapon was punctuated by intermittent explosions as our vehicles jostled over the uneven terrain, and the shocked *Talibs* retreated in the only direction they could—into the open valley. The fight was over before it began, and as we secured our final position, our intelligence sergeant frantically moved from body to body with a picture of Chamtu. “I think this is him, guys...I think we got him.” We slowly gathered in a circle to look upon the white whale. There was little doubt in our minds, and what remained was cast aside as the reports flowed in from across Surobi—“Chamtu is dead. They’re all dead.” We returned in several days to Rabat with equipment and supplies to begin work on their fort and were welcomed as heroes.²³ The men were standing in formation, ready to participate in the defense of their community. They were emboldened. Working alongside Aziz and his soldiers, the once-contentious clans erected their unified fort in three days. As we drove away towards Shkin, we spied the Afghan flag fluttering in the breeze on the highest peak above the town.

Rabat’s changing allegiance provides a clear example of external intervention providing a marked improvement in agency and efficacy. With the psychological specter of Chamtu removed, the clans set to work in implementing their economic revival plan. Within two months, the town opened an additional hotel, resumed education in the dilapidated schoolhouse, and made preparations to open a gas station. However, Chamtu’s killing was essentially a stroke of good fortune. Would our persistence in the hunt have made the outcome inevitable, and could the time dedicated to that task become a cost which exceeded the benefit of alternate courses of action? To answer the question, an examination of our shortcomings in the Rabat agreement is necessary.

Accumulating fiscal wealth in Rabat was a long-term prospect dependent on numerous variables, while the coerced nature of the initial security agreement immediately caused a loss of social and political capital among the village clans. The *maliks* were painfully aware of their manipulation by Aziz and the Shkin elders; coercion

²³ Yaroslav Trofimov, “U.S. Enlists New Afghan Village Forces,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 1, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704103904575336933258787038>.

and manipulation tend to breed resentment, and surely this was the case in Rabat.²⁴ The importance of this mental frame cannot be understated; when people are profoundly unsatisfied with the status quo, they are prone to accept an increasing amount of risk to change their situation.²⁵ VSO as conceived presented the positive side of this coin—a community whose resentment for the Taliban had made the risk of opposing the insurgency a risk worth assuming. We had delivered the opposite by initially depriving Rabat of their last shred of agency. It is highly probable that had we failed to kill Chamtu, or had Aziz died in combat first, the fragile allegiance would have disintegrated and worsened the situation.

However, our gamble was well-founded in one regard: the sociological underpinnings of a shame-based culture.²⁶ While classifying Pashtuns as a shame-based culture is a simplification of reality, the power of honor and shame among the tribes provides a vital point of leverage. If utility is the ability of a good to satisfy a need or want, and honor is the paramount need in such a culture, then the relative utility of a good is also measured by its ability to increase honor. The loss of Rabat, even if coerced, had shamed Chamtu. Action was required to restore his honor, as evidenced by the immediate attack on Malik Abdul's compound. Ironically, that attack and those which targeted the Rabat fortifications following Chamtu's death solidified the clans into a unified front. Aziz and Daria Khan had shrewdly manned the fort with representatives of each clan. While it initially proved to be an awkward arrangement, they knew that an attack on the outpost was inevitable; if every clan was the object of the attack, honor required that the competing factions combine to satisfy a communal need for vengeance. As a result, service in the *Chalwesti* local defense force came to provide the best relative utility by increasing social capital, and fueled Rabat's perception of enhanced agency.

²⁴ Peter F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," in *The Philosophy of Free Will: Essential Readings from the Contemporary Debates*, ed. by Paul Russell and Oisín Deery (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 66.

²⁵ Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision Under Risk," *Econometrica* 47, no. 2 (March 1979): 287.

²⁶ Millie R. Creighton, "Revisiting Shame and Guilt Cultures: A Forty Year Pilgrimage," *Ethos* 18, no. 3 (September 1990): 285.

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III. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF CATASTROPHIC SUCCESS

A. INCENTIVES

Incentives are a means of feedback to encourage or discourage certain actions. Cognitively, humans require feedback to survive; without a means of positive or negative reinforcement, no distinction can be drawn between constructive and destructive behavior.²⁷ Physical or psychological feedback therefore contributes to forethought regarding the outcome if the action is repeated. Positive feedback generally supports repeating the action, while negative feedback discourages the same. However, erroneous beliefs regarding cause and effect tend to play havoc with humans' natural feedback loops.²⁸ When consequences are delayed or irregular, errors in judgment are more difficult to detect.²⁹ The rapid expansion of our VSO effort following our initial success in Rabat illustrates the problems of erroneous cause-and-effect beliefs.

Word spread rapidly of Chamtu's death, as well as our victory in the Taliban stronghold of Pirkowti. Seventeen clans from Orgun to Surobi quickly signed agreements to support the Afghan government. My thoughts were preoccupied by self-satisfaction, but it was short-lived. Frankly, I was not prepared for the effort to expand so rapidly. We did not possess enough equipment and material to build any additional community fortifications, nor supply local defense forces with radio communication. I thought hopefully of the pending approval of the ALP decree, which promised to outfit our irregulars once they were properly trained and vetted by the Ministry of the Interior. Still, even with an approved decree, no supplies had yet been procured. We had no means to supply, support, and mentor so many, and over such a distance. Aziz's original zone of responsibility around Shkin encompassed roughly ten square kilometers. The addition of

²⁷ Joseph Wolpe, "Cognitive Behavior and its Roles in Psychotherapy: An Integrative Account," in *Psychotherapy Process: Current Issues and Future Directions*, ed. by Michael J. Mahoney (New York: Plenum Press, 1980), 186.

²⁸ Bandura *Social Foundations*, 229.

²⁹ James R. Frazier, "Fixed-Ratio Schedule Responding as a Function of Contingency Descriptions and Reinforcement Delay," *Psychological Reports* 33, no. 2 (October 1973): 671.

Rabat had extended his bubble to fifty square kilometers, and with the new tribal signatories, we found ourselves duty-bound to over six hundred square kilometers and over 100,000 people (see Figure 6).

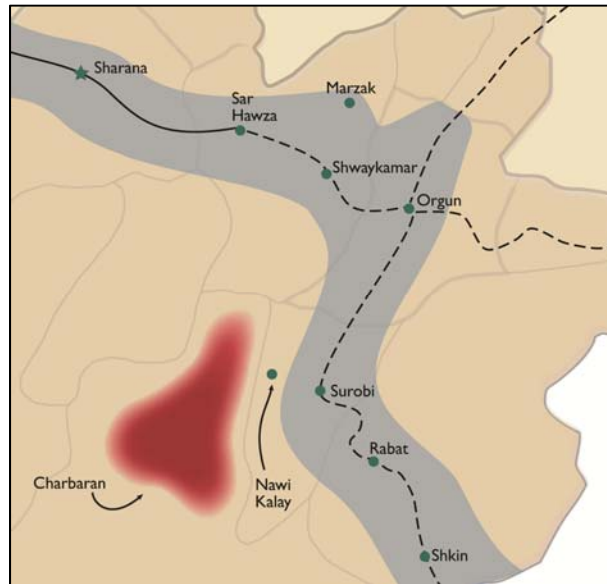


Figure 6. Expansion of the Corridor from Shkin to Orgun

The Taliban, though weakened and off-balance, responded. A shopkeeper in the Surobi bazaar found the head of the most prominent elder of the Adikhel Kharoti, a new and staunch member of the alliance, sitting in the road. The killing sent shock waves through the corridor. To complicate matters, our deployment was drawing to a close, and most of our equipment had been packed and sent to Bagram Airfield. Fortunately, Aziz's skill as a mediator held the fragile alliance together. Winter was coming, and our team was scheduled to return in six months. I had failed to adequately plan for our best-case scenario, and it very nearly ended the expansion of the corridor at Rabat.

My failure in this case was not merely the lack of a solid expansion plan, but also a lack of appreciation for how cause and effect might be misinterpreted. The Adikhel Kharoti had witnessed the rapid evolution of Rabat over the previous month and concluded that if they joined the alliance, they too would receive immediate fortifications, training, and mentorship for economic development plans. These incentives

proved to be a powerful motivator, which unfortunately could not be delivered. The security agreement with the Surobi communities did not include the promise of fortifications or *Chalwesti* training, as we had neither the time nor resources to accomplish it. These communities erroneously believed that Rabat's incentive package was a natural outcome of the decision to side with the Afghan government.

When belief differs from reality, positive or negative consequences cannot effectively shape behavior; however, when people choose to act on erroneous beliefs it can alter the behavior of observers and thus change the social reality.³⁰ In that sense, a poorly-crafted incentive program may inadvertently apply the "social proof" influence mechanism, fueling a self-fulfilling prophecy whose outcome greatly diverges from the original intent.³¹ Such a poorly-crafted incentive plan is likely characterized by flawed or absent consideration of cognitive processes concerning incentive and reward. It is therefore critical to examine the psychological effects of reward on human behavior to design a sound incentive plan.

A prevailing strain of thought among psychologists holds that an intrinsic incentive is superior to an extrinsic incentive, to the point which an extrinsic reward is even considered harmful to innate interest in an activity.³² However, it may actually provide the crucial foundation in which personal interest in an action or behavior is cultivated. Agency requires perceived self-efficacy, and efficacy requires skill acquisition.³³ Many skills are not inherently rewarding or pleasurable, which complicates their acquisition. The first time a child enters a pool, the experience may be frightening, but as he gains familiarity with the water and learns progressively advanced techniques, it may become enjoyable. In time, he may even practice in his free time, join a squad, and set personal goals to improve performance. To reach this point of self-motivated

³⁰ Berna J. Skrypnek and Mark Snyder, "On the Self-Perpetuating Nature of Stereotypes About Women and Men," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 18, no. 3 (1982): 277.

³¹ Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 116.

³² Bandura, *Social Foundations*, 240.

³³ Albert Bandura, "Self-Efficacy Mechanism in Human Agency," *American Psychologist* 37, no. 2 (February 1982): 122.

behavior, an external incentive is often required as a vehicle to encourage the acquisition of skills or competencies; this incentive provides the motivation to persevere through difficult or painful experiences to reach a personal goal.³⁴

When considering the case of a child learning to swim, an incentive program that provides an ice cream cone following a lesson is fairly benign and relatable. In contrast, when considering the case of armed proxies resisting a determined enemy, more than an ice cream cone and reassuring word may be required. Additionally, rewards that clearly derive from an external source for a narrowly defined set of behavior may appear controlling, which tends to weaken the intrinsic motivation to perform the task.³⁵ So long as the paycheck arrives, the task is performed, but once the external inducement is removed, motivation wanes. Again, Paktika Province bore witness to both our success and failure regarding incentive motivators.

B. AN EXTRINSIC INCENTIVE PLAN WITH AN INTRINSIC GOAL

Our team returned to the province in March 2011, and enacted a new, proxy-driven incentive plan. We designed a persistent and relatively cheap program to furnish each district governor with a suite of rented heavy equipment, including flatbed trucks to move it. The governors gained a new level of responsiveness to local grievances, as they could dig culverts and trenches, grade pitted roads, and build earthen barriers to delimit land dispute resolutions. More importantly, when the equipment was not being used, it was available to rapidly erect village fortifications. Our headquarters and supportive infantry brethren provided a seemingly endless supply of barriers, plywood, and beams. By June 2011, more than four-hundred Afghan Local Police defended fourteen posts securing the sixty kilometer stretch from Shkin to Orgun. The traffic began to flow, and the bazaars began to grow.

³⁴ Edwin A. Locke and Gary P. Latham, "Goal Setting Theory," in *Motivation: Theory and Research*, ed. by Harold F. O'Neil and Michael Drillings (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1994), 27.

³⁵ Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions," *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 25, no. 1 (January 2000): 59.

To harness the psychological effect of reward, an incentive plan must possess three characteristics: it must incrementally build competency, capture the power of symbols, and provide a challenge.³⁶ In that regard, the heavy equipment package was possibly the decisive initiative of our experience in Paktika. It focused on incremental increases in a variety of competencies—horizontal construction, hydrology, budgeting, and negotiation—as projects advanced and fortifications emerged. The most tangible U.S. involvement in the program was our team’s intermittent presence during the construction of village fortifications. It was, at face value, an Afghan effort. By providing the governors with the means to accomplish an end and the latitude to act as they saw fit, skills were refined and produced a high degree of self-efficacy in responding to community requirements.

The symbolic significance of the corridor’s fortifications also reinforced popular agency. Symbols are particularly powerful for humans, as they can steer forethought, and in turn, perception of outcome probability.³⁷ One of the most powerful symbols related to the forts was the halogen beacon. Each fort was equipped with at least a primary and secondary halogen spotlight. When the corridor’s defenses reached Orgun, we discovered that each site could view the light from the adjacent two positions; a beacon could signal from Shkin with a message, and reach Orgun within five minutes, depending on the guards’ level of attentiveness. The twinkling spotlights served as a nightly reinforcement of ALP commitment to the people of the valleys and passes.

The third key component of a successful incentive program is linking economic benefit to successful completion of a challenging task.³⁸ What could be more challenging than adequately addressing popular grievances in a population accustomed to total dereliction of civic responsibility, and in the face of armed opposition? The district governor heavy equipment package was an ideal solution to such a situation. Conversely,

³⁶ Bandura, *Social Foundations*, 242.

³⁷ Dale H. Schunk and Ellen L. Usher, “Social Cognitive Theory and Motivation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Human Motivation*, ed. by Richard M. Ryan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 15.

³⁸ Carol S. Dweck, “Motivational Processes Affecting Learning,” *American Psychologist* 41, no. 10 (October 1986): 1040.

cash-for-work programs, a common bulwark of counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan, are the paradigm of a short-sighted incentive program.

In Paktika Province, the pine nut harvest is a labor-intensive period of the year and provides a significant portion of the clans' profit. One technique was to use non-governmental organizations to hire cheap manual labor from the clans for the pine nut harvest to deny a portion of the pool of unemployed young men to the insurgency. I readily supported this program at the time, as its logic was sound. In hindsight, the labor was mindless, the economic benefit was small, and its duration was very short. Not only did we fail to build any level of intrinsic motivation to pursue a challenging task, we also denied the nomadic Kuchi tribesmen a significant portion of their income. Traditionally, the elders hire the Kuchi to harvest pine nuts and pay them a fair share of the profit. Deprived of this revenue, it is not a logical leap to assume the Kuchi increased their smuggling of contraband to close this income gap. Nonetheless, the expansion of VSO and the agency of tribal signatories continued to build momentum. Managing this momentum, however, proved problematic.

Our political and administrative burdens, however, mounted as the effort expanded. In the beginning, the *shuras* were dominated with talk of the enemy; Aziz now found himself mediating tribal disputes, assisting in such trivial matters as the parking and sewage management of Orgun, and periodically answering summons to Kabul to speak with Afghan President Hamid Karzai. The team was stretched thin, dealing with periodic attacks on the ALP while still expanding the fortification of the corridor. Two additional communities north of Orgun had petitioned to participate in the ALP, reaching the edge of the Zadran tribe in Zirok District. VSO had moved far beyond the village concept in eastern Paktika, and signs of stress began to appear. Naively perhaps, I told myself that with a concerted effort, we could quickly secure the final district remaining to link the corridor to the Ring Road: Sar Hawza. My Achilles' heel at this point proved to be our previous successful experiences.

As people experience success in realizing effects through action, patterns of behavior tend to emerge. An action that achieved a desired effect several times before

seems likely to provide a consistent outcome.³⁹ I sought to minimize overt U.S. involvement in VSO expansion, and as a result Aziz had become a trusted and consistent broker when dealing with the tribesmen. The economic benefit of participating in the corridor's alliance had never failed; only our attempts to expand into the rugged mountains lining the corridor had met with significant resistance. I therefore assumed that our tested and proven sequence of expansion would continue indefinitely. Sar Hawza District provided me with a searing mental model of the adage “all politics are local.”

C. CONTENTIOUS TRANSACTIONS

Sar Hawza District was affectionately referred to as “the Taliban Headquarters” by the citizens of Orgun. Some commercial traffic braved the route to the provincial capital of Sharana, but the burnt-out hulks of dozens of vehicles which lined the road testified to its reputation. In particular, a sharp bend in the road which Americans referred to as “Gulruddin” was notorious for extortion and execution of civilians, as well as pitched ambushes targeting military convoys. The Afghans had a different name for our final hurdle: “Shwaykamar” (see Figure 7).

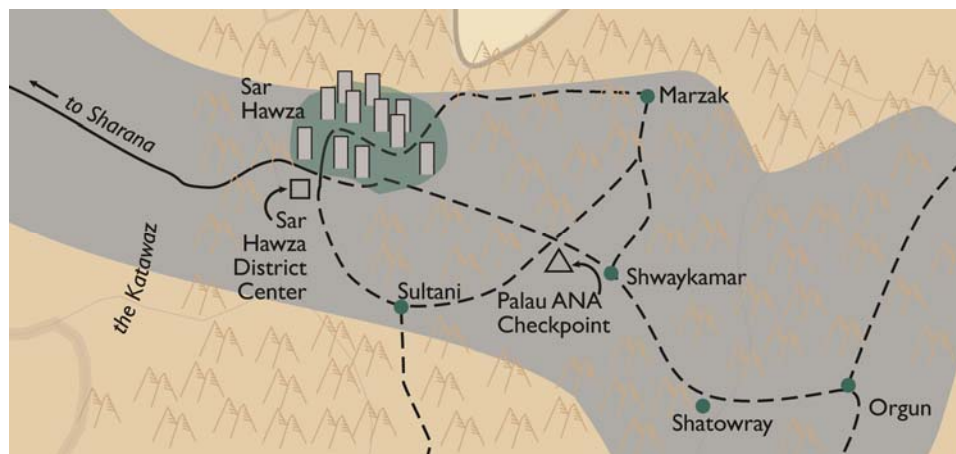


Figure 7. Sar Hawza District, Paktika Province, Afghanistan

Shwaykamar held a special form of psychological control over the population. Beaten dirt roads and several cuts led north to Marzak village, and then over the

³⁹ Bandura, *Social Foundations*, 225.

mountains to Naka District, the birthplace of the Haqqanis. Marzak was the Taliban's rear area during Operation Anaconda in 2002 and had never truly been wrested from their control. From this base of operations, large groups of fighters projected force at will a mere seven kilometers southeast to Shwaykamar. Few families in Orgun lacked a beheaded victim, and refused to drive west without military escort. As a result, no matter what progress our original corridor might make, without control of this terrain east Paktika would remain, essentially, an island unto itself.

The team's original plan forecast reaching this point after thirty-six months of slow and steady expansion. Now, from our latest fortification on the hill above Shatowray village, we found ourselves surveying the next move, the last move to open the road to Kabul. Only sixteen months had passed. This push, however, would be different; no village existed from which to recruit ALP, and the combination of Suleimankhel and Hassankhel Kharoti clans populating the area were decidedly hostile to VSO. Aziz's cult of personality had faltered in Sar Hawza. We encountered obstacles from competing power brokers in the past; the Otmanzai of northern Bermel and the Pirkowti tribe of eastern Orgun district had both successfully denied our political and military maneuvers. However, these tribal areas were easily isolated and bypassed as the corridor crept northwest. We could not bypass Shwaykamar, and so we could not bypass the influence of Mullah Yaquob.

Yaquob was short and unimposing, and was missing his right arm below the elbow. He, like most of his generation, had fought the Russians, and done so very effectively. The veteran *mujahideen* commanders who led the siege of Orgun and the defense of the Satakandow Pass had returned home to Sar Hawza and Zerok following the conflict. Their fame and influence still eclipsed the rising star of Commander Aziz, and he did not like to be reminded of this fact. Each *shura* with Yaquob and his followers was a broken record. We exchanged greetings and pleasantries, extolled the value of the ALP program, and when that inevitably failed, reiterated the veiled threat of direct action against Marzak and Shwaykamar. The tribesmen were unimpressed; they knew, as we did, that without tribal support we would have to convince the Afghan National Army (ANA) or Afghan National Police (ANP) from the provincial capital of Sharana to secure

the point. We would have better luck, it was believed, convincing Taliban leader Mullah Omar to provide constables.

Our previous incentive program had failed. Its psychological foundation was correct, but political maneuver also relies on the favorable motivation of stakeholders with the authority to effect a program's implementation.⁴⁰ So long as Mullah Yaquob resisted implementation, our expansion was effectively vetoed. The power brokers of Sar Hawza would not tolerate any participation from Commander Aziz or anyone associated with him. A third, neutral party was required for this political transaction.

Every transaction carries a cost in time, money, or enforcement, and every additional layer of transaction increases cost.⁴¹ Direct transactions are completely transparent; the consumer deals directly with the vendor to procure a good. When a consumer is purchasing groceries, his end is simple and clear, and his power relative to the market extends no further than his ability to foment a boycott. These direct transactions are the means through which people generally converse, barter, and negotiate. The more interesting exchange in the pursuit of shaping human behavior is the indirect transaction. The indirect variety is naturally more expensive than a direct transaction, as it involves at least one additional layer; however, the marginal cost increase of indirect investment is more than offset by the proxy's social and political capital that is preserved or expanded by cultivating degrees of separation.

The indirect transaction is characterized by its nature, mechanism, and goal. Its nature, given the desire to create degrees of separation between the proxy and sponsor, may be covert or clandestine. A clandestine effort involves a significant amount of transaction costs beyond a normal exchange, and its potential exposure can provide a greater liability than asset to a strategic initiative as a result. A covert action is also expensive, although likely to a lesser degree. It is generally more feasible to conceal the

⁴⁰ Grant T. Savage, Timothy W. Nix, Carlton J. Whitehead, and John D. Blair, "Strategies for Assessing and Managing Organizational Stakeholders," *The Executive* 5, no. 2 (May 1991): 61.

⁴¹ Carl J. Dahlman, "The Problem of Externality," *Journal of Law and Economics* 22, no. 1 (April 1979): 142.

identity of an actor than the action itself when violence is involved.⁴² A third nature of indirect transactions is emerging as a contender in the information age: political expediency. A politically expedient transaction assumes that the target audience knows or can easily deduce the sponsor, but if the sponsor's intervention is achieving desired effects at a threshold which does not prompt a counteraction from opponents, the sponsor can escape external judgment and the proxy can avoid internal loss of legitimacy. The situation in eastern Ukraine as of July 2014 is an excellent example of a politically expedient transaction as it relates to proxies in armed conflict.

However the indirect transaction is conceived, it must involve an exchange of goods or services; to that end, it requires a process to convert sponsor resources – financial, political, and social forms of capital—into capacity. A transfer of financial, political, or social capital occurs through a wide variety of avenues, and potentially to either witting or unwitting targets. A witting target, a proxy in this case, is the middleman in the indirect transaction between the sponsor and the target. He may receive financial incentives through cash, formal banking, or money service businesses; however, given the importance of concealing the scope and nature of sponsorship in an indirect transaction, more secure methods are preferable. The use of informal value transfer systems such as hawalas, or trade-based money laundering is thus preferable. A witting target may also receive political or social capital from a sponsor through lobbying, assistance in policy initiatives, and propaganda support.

The means by which we ultimately seized Shwaykamar, built fortifications, and opened the corridor was the result of indirect transactions through witting proxies to an unwitting target, and included all forms of capital. While the eventual solution was elegantly manipulative, we surely did not envision such a Machiavellian strategy from the outset; we stumbled into it by virtue of Aziz's personal network. We first approached the ANA Brigade Commander to discuss options for manning a fort. Provincial Governor Mohibullah Samim, perhaps our greatest political supporter, went so far as ordering the ANA to man a post if we built it for them. The Brigade Commander, however, was a

⁴² Loch K. Johnston, "On Drawing a Bright Line for Covert Operations," *The American Journal of International Law* 86, no. 2 (April 1992): 285.

skilled politician and effectively rebuffed the Governor's attempts. Aziz therefore turned to another strong supporter, in words if not deeds, Provincial Chief of Police Daulat Khan.

Daulat Khan was a thin, jovial man, always dressed in a pressed uniform adorned with as many badges as the bazaar could provide. His office was littered with parting gifts from American military advisors, and the walls were covered with pictures of him speaking at the most fashionable gatherings. He was not, however, a particularly ambitious man. Daulat did not desire promotion, but rather a strong reputation in Paktika, the province of his birth. He had provided Aziz with an increasing amount of administrative and logistical support as our effort expanded, and was more than happy to claim his share of credit for its success as a result. Through this self-interested patriot, Aziz would find the forces required to seize Shwaykamar from the *talibs*.

While corruption and bribery is a regular occurrence among Afghan authorities, Aziz was painfully aware of the perpetual microscope his political rivals, journalist critics, and American benefactors placed on his operations. For this reason, he largely prevented bribery and extortion throughout the corridor and his own force; in this case, he was sorely tempted to use a portion of his substantial personal assets to bribe Daulat Khan. He avoided the temptation through a clever web of capital exchange. Hajji Ibrahim, a native of Orgun who had moved to Kabul and amassed a small fortune through a string of car dealerships, had received word of Orgun's pending economic resurgence and spied an opportunity. He wanted not only a share of Orgun's growing automobile sales and service sector, but the position of District Shura Chairman, and called Aziz for advice and assistance.

Aziz seized upon the fortunate development, forming a political coalition against the sitting Shura Chairman, Juma. Aziz's network of supporters generated public support for the idea of recalling Hajji Ibrahim from Kabul to manage Orgun's economic future. Ibrahim reluctantly accepted this great honor, and arrived with a caravan of luxury cars which his Tajik clan had received free of charge through a barter for political favors in Kabul. These cars were then sold in the Orgun bazaar at full market value, including the nicest one to Aziz. Hajji Ibrahim then wisely invested the money into bazaar and corridor

security improvements, whose maintenance required a modest tax from the bazaar's shopkeepers. This tax was collected by the Afghan National Police, whom Daulat Khan ultimately supervised. Aziz completed the exchange by publicly praising Daulat Khan's support, initiative, and leadership in Orgun and Sharana. The Chief's reputation was bolstered, his department's coffers were filled (as likely were his own), and the agreement was signed.

An unwitting target may receive capital through the same processes without the use of a proxy middleman; but as such a transaction is essentially covert, this increases the transaction costs to the sponsor as additional security measures are required to conceal its identity. Additionally, should the sponsor's identity be revealed, the political cost may prove so extreme that the risk was not worth the potential benefit. Therefore, the most effective process for indirectly delivering a form of capital to an unwitting target is through psychological manipulation of his political and social environment. Since action based on erroneous beliefs is a means of altering social reality, in this case applying psychological influence to alter belief is a potentially valuable course of action. Principles of influence which have proven highly effective in securing compliance include: reciprocity, in which a target is provided with a good, prompting a feeling of debt; commitment and consistency, whereby a target commits to a seemingly benign action and feels compelled to justify the choice through consistent repetition; scarcity of time and resources, which relies on the human drive to avoid missing a favorable opportunity; and the aforementioned social proof.

The inadvertent application of social proof, as stated previously, is a sign of a poorly-crafted incentive plan; the purposeful and deliberate application of the technique, however, is highly effective in shaping social reality.⁴³ Participation in the ALP program throughout the corridor began to be viewed as proper clan behavior, and a new social dynamic emerged. In April of 2011, the village of Zama, located on the border between Orgun and Surobi District at the primary mountain pass into the Taliban stronghold of Charbaran, was a house divided. A Kharoti clan populated the southern side of the

⁴³ Cialdini, *Influence*, 127.

community, while Tajiks resided in the northern side; no love was lost between the two. Nonetheless, both clans volunteered for the ALP program, and each received its own fort in early June 2011, no more than one kilometer apart. The “tale of two cities” continued, until a Kharoti ALP infiltrator attempted to drug and murder his compatriots in their fort. He laced their evening meal with a powerful sedative, which the patrolmen readily consumed—all except one. The insider had informed his cousin, who was manning the guard tower containing the halogen beacon, not to eat the food. The cousin quietly flashed the distress signal to the Tajik OP, who sprang into action, launching a patrol which captured the insider and defended the fort until Aziz could arrive to evacuate the sick for treatment. The Taliban group in Charbaran was infuriated, and the following week launched an assault on the Kharoti fort; again, the Tajiks responded and assisted the Kharoti in repelling the Talibs. Clan distinction had become secondary to ALP affiliation and the commercial allegiance, and social capital in the community was enhanced. It was our hope that such an outcome would be possible in Sar Hawza if the last lawless point on the road could be secured.

With the Shwaykamar defense agreement settled, we began to consolidate a massive amount of construction material and the entirety of the region’s leased heavy equipment. This operation would unfold during *Ramadan*, which provided its own set of complications.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, the effort proceeded. On August 22nd, 2011, the advance guard of this massive column, spearheaded by a platoon of Aziz’s men with ODA advisors, arrived in Shwaykamar and secured key terrain. Several hours later, a combat train of more than fifty vehicles began to arrive; bulldozers and excavators slid down the ramps and set to work on the first task: cutting a road up the mountain. Within three days, the fortification was complete, and we prepared the defense. Each night the *Talibs* probed the position, firing inaccurate volleys of rocket propelled grenades. We began to wonder if Daulat Khan would honor the agreement, but on the fourth day forty ANP arrived to man their posts. The probing attacks ceased. Aziz unexpectedly mounted an All-Terrain

⁴⁴ Ramadan is the ninth month of the lunar Islamic calendar, during which adherents are expected to refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, and engaging in sexual relations during daylight hours. Exemptions are granted for a variety of reasons, including military necessity; however, in the author’s experience, most adherents attempted to minimize their food and water intake, if not actually abstain, which significantly skewed expectations of physical labor capacity and combat effectiveness.

Vehicle (ATV) and sped towards Sharana, as my ATV and two Humvees raced to keep pace and ensure he arrived safely.

As he reached the bustling Sharana bazaar, Aziz rode in a wide circle, announcing on his megaphone, “Shwaykamar is taken! The road is open!” Additional riders were dispatched to the Orgun bazaar to proclaim the news. With the fortification manned and functioning, one third of the team remained to provide support while the rest of us returned to Orgun to refit the column and plan the next iteration of VSO expansion, presumably to Sar Hawza village. We arrived on August 24, and on the morning of August 26 decided to purchase food from the bazaar to break the fast with Aziz and his men. The scene that unfolded was unimaginable.

Eid al Fitr, the second-holiest of Muslim holy days, marks the end of *Ramadan*; in 2011, *Eid* fell on August 30th. Traditionally, in Orgun, families reassemble from across the country, flooding the bazaar with revelers and music. The music had fallen silent in 2006, as the Taliban regained control of Shwaykamar. Orgun natives working in Kabul and beyond were effectively isolated. With the road now open, we found that the bazaar, despite its significant growth over the past several months, was woefully unprepared for the weight of the diaspora’s return. The streets bulged with arriving Hilux trucks and taxis ferrying hundreds and thousands of the previously displaced to their ancestral home.

On the night of *Eid*, we broke the fast in Aziz’s dining room then drove towards the bazaar with our escorts. The music, cheering, and interminable snapping of celebratory rifle fire grew louder as we approached. The throng became too thick for our Land Cruiser to transit; we paused and sat upon the roof and the hood, watching the surreal scene in amazement. I turned to Paizullah, my perpetual bodyguard, and shook his hand as he smiled at the sight. Paizullah was killed by an improvised explosive device the following month as we expanded further into Sar Hawza District. His loss was particularly hard for the team and his comrades, prompting a harsh, internal questioning of our assumptions, methodology, and general optimism that such suspicious, self-interested actors could collaborate on a grand project of mutual interest.

IV. CONCLUSION

As 2011 drew to a close and we buried Paizullah, our demonstrated successes and the intuitive logic of expected utility sustained my belief in the power of financial gain. A study of competing psychological theories, however, has since offered more comprehensive explanations of the tribes' decisions and individual behavior in Paktika, with compelling insights for influence practitioners. A sound incentive plan should seek to alter a target's intrinsic values by enhancing human agency, yet must simultaneously enhance the influencer's goals; how is such a seeming contradiction possible? To create a sound incentive plan which motivates true behavior modification, an influencer must consider the inherent risks of action (from the targets' perspective), inspire the targets' action through a narrative that conveys both an ideological and practical concerns, and then match incentive to narrative in the most subtle manner possible as to avoid an artificial, manipulative perception.

Risk assessment is cognitively derived from expectation, and expectation stems from instinctive biological cues, observational learning, and tangible promises of reward and punishment.⁴⁵ Biological cues, particularly the adrenal "fight or flight" response, are activated in situations of severe uncertainty concerning survival, but can be manipulated through the reciprocal relationship of environment and cognition.⁴⁶ One's environment is composed of the physical landscape and cultural patterns of behavior, and these in turn form basic cognition patterns of symbolism and forethought which inform instinctive reactions of danger.

As a result, for an influencer, three variables emerge to manage the targets' perceived risk: the nature of the physical environment, the character of social transactions, and the probability of realizing a threat or promise. The physical environment can change dramatically through human engineering – consider the impact

⁴⁵ This section summarizes the congruous findings of all the aforementioned theories of behavior: Expected Utility, Info-Gap, Social Cognitive Theory, Prospect Theory, Goal Setting Theory, et al. For more information on any of these theories, consult the primary sources listed in the footnotes and bibliography

⁴⁶ Bandura, *Social Foundations*, 199.

of the Eisenhower Interstate Highway System on the physical and cultural character of America since the 1950s. On a micro scale, the same tenet holds true: physical accessibility provides the potential for enhanced defense and profit. Increased accessibility also contributes to the character of social interactions, as once parochial and isolated social groups recognize and leverage opportunities for self-interested benefit among an extended network. The probability of realizing a threat or promise, however, is a more interesting variable as both contenders for legitimacy (the influencer's position and that of the existing authority) are capable of affecting this popular decision in a highly dynamic manner. Both parties are, essentially, salesmen attempting to bolster "consumer confidence" for their respective ideologies.⁴⁷

Salesmanship rests on the strength of a narrative, including the quality of the product, the inferiority of competitors, the benefits the product will offer the consumer, and most importantly, the consumer's fundamental need for such a product. A strong narrative convinces the target audience that a certain action is in its self-interest, and that failure to act now will result in a missed opportunity, possibly with dire consequences.⁴⁸ Such positive or negative consequences should include both ideological and practical concerns. Potential economic benefit is not sufficient if a sacred ideological value is posed as a counterpoint; if a proposed behavior is touted as a defense of a traditional (or even sacred) value, and happens to also deliver economic benefit, then such a narrative should motivate desired action.

Given a successful narrative that manipulates risk perception and behavior, and which considers both values-based and utility-based arguments, the role of an incentive plan is no longer to cajole compliance into a foreign value system or behavioral norms, but rather to reinforce the idea that the target's chosen, intrinsically-motivated action is correct on multiple levels. Whether this reinforcement is social, political, or financial, a well-conceived incentive plan strengthens the influence concept of commitment, eliciting

⁴⁷ Consumer confidence is an economic indicator measured by several independent agencies in the United States to gauge the average citizen's level of economic comfort; a high level of consumer confidence suggests a high level of job and income security, with corresponding benefits for consumption and investment.

⁴⁸ Cialdini, *Influence*, 238.

even irrational action to justify previous behavior.⁴⁹ Incentives can subtly (and in some cases, rapidly) shape value systems, but an influencer's probability of success depends largely on the manipulation of perceived risk and accepted narrative.

Paizullah died as one statement of our opposition's competing narrative. He was a patriot, and the embodiment of human agency, a young man who decided that through his own actions he could affect his environment. However, he could not have changed it alone, nor could our concerted efforts based on pure Expected Utility, no matter how much I may have believed in its efficacy. From 2010–2012, Paktika was a model of decision-making under severe uncertainty. Numerous theories attempt to describe the nature of such an environment and its decision-making process, but the core truths of each academic heritage can be distilled into four principles. Humans cultivate value systems which guide thought and action, but these systems are transient and subject to influence; humans are sensitive to risk, seek the highest degree of certainty when time allows, and will rationalize or justify their decision after the fact; a resonant narrative can potentially leverage the former alleged "weaknesses" towards a desired action; and incentives are most effectively employed when they are least conspicuous.

I originally sought to reshape the economic order of eastern Paktika Province. What likely happened was, in hindsight, that an effective narrative of the economic benefits of the corridor manipulated perceived risk levels, which was reinforced by a select group of narrative-supporting data points.⁵⁰ This environment, in turn, prompted action by the tribes, causing a consistency-based opposition to the insurgency (so long as the insurgency failed to advance its goals). The incentive plan we originally crafted to serve our own ends of corridor fortification (the heavy equipment lease) reinforced the commitment and efficacy narrative of the now-empowered Afghan authorities, causing a reinforcing loop of behavior, so long as our adversary's actions did not sufficiently counteract it.

⁴⁹ Cialdini, *Influence*, 59.

⁵⁰ The death of Chamtu and the decisive defeat of the Taliban force in Pirkowti two days later, combined with several smaller engagements, tribal actions, and public displays of Afghan patriotism such as the "Paktika Security Jirga" in July 2010 suggested a drastic (but fragile) shift in popular behavior, as witnessed by the author.

In summary, expected utility theory is real and a valuable concept, but it is a foundational concept. Social cognitive theory is all-encompassing, but less helpful in crafting non-abstract strategies. Perhaps no great thinker will ever promote a theory that captures all the intricacies of human thought and action while simultaneously distilling them into a simple formula which is academically unassailable. Nonetheless, a potential influencer can take heart; every target audience across the globe is waiting to be inspired by the latest offer of prosperity. If an incentive plan capitalizes on the nature of risk, reward, and supporting narrative, while understanding the importance of bolstering the target's perception of agency as it relates to intrinsic values, then behavior can, in a sense, be bought. Nonetheless, buyer beware: "man is not a rational animal, but a rationalizing one."⁵¹ There are no sure deals in the field of influence, only marginal risks and outright gambles.

⁵¹ Robert Heinlein, *Assignment in Eternity* (Reading, Pennsylvania: Fantasy Press, 1953).

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