



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 5TH BRIGADE, 2ND INFANTRY DIVISION
Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington 98433

20 August 2010

MEMORANDUM FOR the Honorable John McHugh, Secretary of the Army, 101 Army
Pentagon, Washington, DC 20310-0101

SUBJECT: Open Door Policy—Report from a Tactical Commander

1. Before changing command last month I served as the Commander of 5/2 ID (SBCT) for 3 ½ years and Task Force Stryker for one year in southern Afghanistan. I had the pleasure to meet you during your visit to RC (S) last year. It is with great regret that I write this letter to you but I feel compelled as a matter of the open door policy to describe my perspective about the conduct of tactical operations in southern Afghanistan. I have spoken formally and informally about many of the problems expressed herein to various members of the chain of command but there is little many of them can do to improve the situation, so I am writing to you.
2. The main problem that we are having in the war today is not one of enemy capability; it is a lack of professional competence. We have developed a cadre of senior leaders so informed by the historically inaccurate idea that a population can be a center of gravity that we are unwilling to conduct operations that reflect sound military art and science. Consequently, American troops are needlessly exposed to increased enemy attack, suffer unnecessary casualties, cannot secure or control the indigenous population, and are not allowed to deny freedom of movement or maneuver to the Taliban. While we remain a hard-working dedicated military force with substantial potential history will show that we have been poorly led in the field.
3. Afghanistan was my third combat campaign, I am a one of the Army's formally trained military historians, and I completed the one-year South Asia area studies program at the National War College. I have the experience and training to make a few objective assessments: the lack of skilled military leadership, the prioritization of the protection of civilians above that required by the law of war, and the preference to provide American resources to NATO allies above the needs of American troops, without question compromises force protection for Americans. It is difficult to find a time in our Army's history in which the colonel and general officer ranks are manned by so many officers with such little small unit combat maneuver experience. After so many years of war, the lack of senior leader close combat experience *in this war* contributes substantially to the fact that relevant tactical doctrine is absent. The COIN doctrine that does exist consists of musings from amateurs, contractors, plagiarized journal articles, etc. It is not professional and relevant because it does not reflect the studied body of best practice—the concepts it promotes, in fact, contribute to needless American casualties.
4. COIN has become such a restrictive dogma that it cannot be questioned; any professional discussion about its strengths and weaknesses is discouraged. It has reached such a crisis that those who employ other Army *doctrinal* concepts do so at their own professional peril because they will be subject to censure for not adhering to COIN. This has created a dysfunctional and

toxic leadership environment throughout our Army which has resulted in poor organization, unrealistic training, and indecisive battlefield performance.

5. Specifically in Afghanistan there is reckless optimism and the situation has deteriorated substantially in southern Afghanistan. That is my personal assessment as a tactical commander who employed forces of battalion size or larger in three provinces of RC (S). The Taliban generally have freedom of movement and maneuver and a major contributing factor to the increase of enemy capability is consistently poor military performance by MajGen Carter (UK) and his inadequately trained staff. This team does not have the ability to plan, coordinate, or execute rudimentary tasks at the division level. They issue orders with nonsense tactical tasks to “discombobulate” the enemy or place them “on the horns of a dilemma.” They display a dangerous insouciance towards operations. For example during Reliefs in Place—among the most hazardous military operations to execute—RC (S) does little planning for them and issues orders that unnecessarily increase the risk to the force. In our experience, conducting Relief in Place operations in southern Arghandab District, Maiwand District, and western Zhari District, MajGen Carter deliberately placed incoming units in charge which means that units new to highly lethal areas were ordered to control the relief rather than the seasoned combat savvy unit. This is inconsistent with doctrine, training, and it is very dangerous.

6. Our potential for greater coalition casualties does not have to be inevitable, but due to our flawed approach to operations we wind up enabling our enemy. The population-centric approach which places the population as the center of gravity is applied to the point of absurdity. The enemy is entrenching himself among the civilian population as we cede to him territory and lines of communication. Our poor military approach, inadequate tactics, and haphazard operational art are compounded by NATO partnership in general and British leadership specifically. A gross lack of concern for subordinates manifests in guidance that “zero” civilian casualties are acceptable and coalition soldiers may have to be killed rather than defend themselves against a potential threat and risk being wrong and possibly resulting in injury or death of civilians—a verbal order from MajGen Carter. Coalition efforts in southern Afghanistan were on the verge of failure last year. Placing American troops under the same leadership—Canadian and British—that led to the failing environment has made the situation worse; it is not the resources that are wanting, it is leadership and the approach to operations that fails.

7. In November 2009 MajGen Carter assumed command of RC (S) with a one-page plan for operations. The overly simplistic approach was first briefed to me by MajGen Carter during his visit to Fort Lewis, Washington about six-months before he assumed command—it did not change upon his arrival. This means that, quite simply, he did not acknowledge improvements to the operational environment in the intervening months after Task Force Leatherneck and Task Force Stryker had been deployed. The centerpiece of the operational design, briefed at Fort Lewis and again in Afghanistan, was to employ Task Force Stryker to establish freedom of movement *for Afghan civilians* on highways. The standard was to ensure that civilians had freedom of movement *comparable to that of the Taliban era*. This is not a reasonable task since there was little freedom of movement—particularly for females—under the Taliban. Had MajGen Carter considered the enemy he would have realized that the Taliban wanted to fix coalition forces to the roads so the Taliban could maintain their influence with the population. Task Force Stryker, the formation with more intelligence, communications, mobility, infantry,

and cavalry capability than any other BCT in our Army, was thus fixed to major highways just as the enemy desired.

8. In order to implement his operational concept MajGen Carter reassigned units to perform maneuver tasks that they were not organized, trained, equipped, and deployed to conduct. For example 1-17 IN was replaced by elements of 4/82 ABN in southern Arghandab District. 4/82 ABN was organized, trained, equipped, and deployed to perform a training, mentoring, and advisory mission with the Afghan Army and Police. MajGen Carter clearly employed them in a role that they were not designed for based upon an operational design that underwent no scrutiny. Formations that are assigned maneuver tasks without the requisite training or equipment will suffer increased and unnecessary casualties.

9. As a consequence of the re-mission, many 4/82 ABN American mentors were taken away from Afghan units and this degraded Afghan capacity in our areas. When Task Force Stryker arrived in southern Afghanistan in July 2009 Afghan Security Forces conducted planning, rehearsals, and would lead security operations such as the national elections (August 2009). As late as October 2009 mentored Afghan Army battalions were performing security operations and Stryker units had operated in support of these mentored, but nonetheless, Afghan Army planned and led operations. MajGen Carter further directed that we would demonstrate to Afghans how to plan and execute operations rather than let them lead them. The result was that the RC (S) staff wrote orders and Afghans publicly issued them side by side with an ISAF officer—it was a deceptive show. The idea that Afghan forces can lead operations such as Marjah, as was touted in the media when the operation began, is pure fancy.

10. Once it became obvious that the original freedom of movement concept would not work as planned MajGen Carter nonetheless insisted on moving 4-23 IN, a Stryker battalion in Zabul Province, a neglected area of RC (S) that had become a safe haven and infiltration route for Taliban, to Helmand Province, an area in which the British had primacy and considerable coalition force. The end result was that from January 2010 until June 2010 Task Force Stryker secured British lines of communication in Helmand Province. (Task Force Leatherneck secured their own lines of communication.) After six months of operations, as 4-23 IN was preparing to redeploy to the United States it became critical to move them *back* to Zabul Province. Thus rather than move an incoming unit directly into the province, 4-23 IN returned in June 2010. This was claimed to be necessary to relieve elements of 4/82 ABN so that they could be deployed in and around Kandahar City. There are two important things to note: (1) this mission, to secure Kandahar City and its environs, was exactly how American forces were arrayed before being dispatched in the ill-conceived freedom of movement mission and (2) all of the maneuver was done by United States Army units—an extravagant use of tens of millions of American taxpayer dollars to placate British units and commanders.

11. British leaders feel no obligation to respect the cultural traditions or expertise of the American component. This has included everything from disparaging comments about Speaker Pelosi in public (MajGen Carter compared her to Ahmed Wali Karzai) to non-traditional seating by moving Americans to the end of the conference table and back of the room which limits their ability to contribute even though they control most of the resources. In addition to marginalizing American leaders, British forces take advantage of American resources such as Full Motion

Video from Unmanned Aerial Systems, Route Clearance Packages, and other capability that should go to American soldiers. We had instances when these tools were denied to American troops in contact because they were not released from British control (even though they were observing no enemy activity). A more direct example of disregard for Americans is the manner in which Task Force Helmand addressed a catastrophic IED strike on an American engineer vehicle supporting their operations. The vehicle was attacked with an IED and one US Soldier was killed. The killed and wounded were evacuated, but the remaining Soldiers were left for several days on the disabled vehicle before recovery. Once the damaged vehicle was evacuated to a local FOB, it took approximately 45 days for the American engineer battalion to recover their piece of equipment from the province because support from Task Force Helmand was not forthcoming. American engineers were eventually forced, at great risk, to get the equipment themselves—having another Route Clearance Package battle damaged in the process. Another instance occurred when the 402nd BSB was conducting a joint resupply patrol with the British and was abandoned half way through the patrol. The British took the *American* Route Clearance Package and simply left. The engineer task force sent two Route Clearance Packages to recover this BSB patrol—it took two because the first one was blown up.

12. This is not to say that all associations with British and other coalition forces are poor; British rotary wing aviation and medical personnel are recognized as true professionals. Canadian mentor teams and Australian SOF consistently provided a superior level of support to Task Force Stryker in Kandahar and Helmand provinces—they are exceptional partners. But the denial of American resources to American soldiers that is commonplace is heart-breaking. The United States and Romania allow military personnel to travel on aircraft that do not have armor or defense capability, but several other partner nations do not. The result is that foreign military members are frequently prioritized at a higher level to fly on United States military aircraft *which takes seats from Americans* who are left to fly civilian contracted air. We expose our own service members to greater danger for the convenience of our partners and the American taxpayer, who has provided this capability for the protection of *Americans*, is deceived.

13. RC (S) attempts to manipulate the public information environment are very nearly to the point of being disingenuous. The plan to secure Kandahar City was continually delayed. (In fact, the urgency to move 4-23 IN back to Zabul before their redeployment was to support this plan.) Nonetheless, MajGen Carter attempted to create the public impression that operations were not delayed. This is important because it could have created a misperception for the American public about the success of operations in southern Afghanistan—as fall approaches and enemy activity decreases it would have seemed as if the security plan had worked. However, this would not be true—the Taliban normally curtail operations in the fall (this is a well-known fact). The pace of enemy activity would undoubtedly have picked up next year since enemy forces would have never been degraded, defeated, or destroyed. The implication that operations were not delayed and that there was no tactical consequences would have been a gross fraud perpetrated on the American public.

14. As part of our formula for success we place a remarkable amount of emphasis on the Afghan Security Forces without understanding the men who make up that force. It is very unlikely that we will be able to provide Afghans with a level of education and training to make them an independent and reliable force that can deny Afghanistan as a safe haven to terrorists. Even

though the Afghan Army in particular has demonstrated an ability to lead operations to a certain degree—such as during the elections—the reality is that they do not sustain themselves well and their competency is at a basic level. The Soviet Union's attempt to create a professional independent military collapsed as soon as the Soviets withdrew, which is what contributed to the ascendancy of the Taliban. This should provide an obviously cautionary tale.

15. An overview of a few cultural behaviors of Pashtu men might help one make an informed assessment about the efficacy of plans requiring independent performance from Afghan security forces—to determine if the objective is consistent with the reality. This cultural information is well known, there are numerous anecdotal reports, and there is a growing body of research from Human Terrain Teams and others.

- a. It is unlikely that Afghan security forces will be able to conduct independent operations with any degree of reliability because of a lack of technical skills. For example they do not have the ability to maintain vehicle fleets very well—most Afghans simply cannot drive. Out of a class of ten at our recent academy to train a Fire and Rescue Service for Spin Boldak District, only two of the trainees had ever driven a vehicle—and that is giving credit to the trainee who had driven a tractor once or twice in his life. Even simple tasks such as maintaining the head space and timing on M2 HB .50 cal Machineguns present challenges.
- b. Attempts to integrate women into the security forces are unlikely to succeed. If this is an indicator of success we will assuredly fail. Afghan males are among the greatest misogynists in the world. The Burqa is not a Taliban invention; it is a Pashtu cultural norm. Efforts to integrate women into the military, government, and education are unlikely to meet with success.
- c. Health and hygiene will not be maintained at an acceptable level to sustain availability of personnel. Afghan military units—particularly small outposts—are bastions of filth. Rudimentary latrine facilities such as slit trenches are absent—even “cat holes” are unheard of. Afghans will select a room, if they are in a compound, and use it for a latrine. If they are in an outdoor outpost they defecate in an area without measures to burn or discard the excrement—I have seen filth overflowing at such outposts. They use water, grass, or other materials to clean themselves—no soap and no barrier between their hands and feces. This is an enormous health hazard. A formation full of chronically sick people does not fight very well.
- d. Aberrant sexual behavior is acceptable. Considering the misogynistic culture that is common one should not be surprised that most men who join the security forces will have had limited interaction with women—a recruit may have never been alone with a woman who is not a relative. There is an acceptance of pedophilia that is wide spread and boys are sometimes kidnapped. Leaders have been known to sexually assault male subordinates—even if sexual activity between males is consensual it has implications for good order and discipline which is why, in many armies, fraternization is not allowed.

- e. NCOs cannot perform basic leadership and supply accountability functions well because they are largely illiterate. NCOs cannot manage clothing records for their illiterate soldiers, they cannot maintain weapons and equipment accountability if they cannot read a serial number, they cannot read an operations order for a tactical mission. Since officers are frequently the ones who can read and write they may be relied upon to perform administrative duties rather than combat leadership—further limiting any potential for a well led Afghan security apparatus that complements the security needs of the United States.
 - f. Of course the Taliban have similar problems. However, Taliban operations are smaller, their weapons and equipment much less sophisticated, and their objectives more narrowly focused so the impact is not as severe for them.
 - g. Finally, a main COIN assumption is that the population does not want *what* the Taliban have to offer. This is an unbelievably flawed assumption—it might be more correct to assess that the population does not like *how* the Taliban deliver but the incontrovertible fact is that the Taliban are Pashtu and their cultural norms are the same as any other Pashtu male. Remember, the Burqa is a Pashtu cultural tradition. In fact, religiously inspired Pashtu movements are a traditional part of life in southern Afghanistan. The British, who in the nineteenth century were routinely forced to deal with such activity had a nickname for them: “*Mad Mullah Movements*.” The most frequently ignored fact is that the average farmer in southern Afghanistan will appreciate far more what Mullah Omar is proposing than what we are with COIN, he just does not respond to *how* Mullah Omar is peddling his ideas.
16. We are a chronic failure as a military force due to COIN dogma. The population-centric emphasis consistently results in poor intelligence because the enemy and relevant cultural history is frequently ignored. Analysts focus on benign aspects of the environment such as tribes, population densities, and other areas of interest that are important *when done collaboratively* with enemy and other analysis, but yield little relevant information for operations when done as the focus of intelligence. MG Flynn’s recent treatise on intelligence offers a window into this way of thinking. A military intelligence officer promoting the idea that we focus too much effort on the enemy during a period of increasing American casualties is reflective of indifference toward American losses and demonstrative of an incompetent military art and science.
17. After almost nine years the Army must still consider the war as a temporary activity because so many Cold War relic formations remain. Anti-tank units and nuclear, biological, and chemical formations thrive even though we are not fighting enemy forces with an armor or chemical capability. Some residual capability may be important for an emergency but, for example, Air Defense Artillery personnel take up thousands of spaces that could be converted to infantry, intelligence, etc. Artillery remains relevant but it is organized completely wrong for this war. Our equipping strategy is inconsistent due to these old MTOEs. For example equipment that is routinely used in combat such as M-14 rifles, additional mine detectors, and millions of dollars of supplemental items per brigade, is issued at the last minute or requested during deployment—then it is turned in at the end of the year so the unit does not even have it while it prepares for future combat. Rather than reorganize and retrain elements of the Army for

missions in the contemporary operating environment, we maintain outdated formations—hurriedly assign them to other tasks and send them to a theater of war untrained for their new task. An example of this is 3-5 FA, a Field Artillery unit that was deployed to Afghanistan to perform a route clearance mission. They were trained in theater and worked with Task Force Stryker—they did an outstanding job but that is not the point. They were sent to combat untrained—they never saw or operated with the route clearance equipment and tactics they were expected to employ before their arrival in southern Afghanistan. Our Army refuses to adapt and all of this needlessly puts soldiers performing direct combat missions at risk.

18. Worst of all COIN dogma has degraded our willingness to properly, effectively, and realistically train for combat. As the commander of 5/2 ID (SBCT) I was continually badgered to not conduct brigade maneuver live fire training before deploying because NTC leaders deemed that we were already “too lethal” of an organization. As a military historian I am simply not familiar with the concept of an infantry brigade being too lethal and thus denied live fire training. The fact is that when we arrived in RC (S) in July 2009 and deployed to the field 5-7 August 2009 elements of the brigade began to make contact with the enemy in unexpected areas almost immediately. The intelligence that we were provided was very far off of the mark and we were subsequently forced to conduct a brigade attack as a matter of force protection almost without delay. We had to do the attack without the benefit of the live fire training that we requested at NTC.

19. Every major tactical concept by MajGen Carter that involves American units has required the approval or support of American flag officers. Because MajGen Carter’s plans are so poorly thought out, this implies that either the American chain of command has a poor grasp of military art and science or they believe that the force protection of American soldiers must be subordinated to the needs of the coalition. Population-centric approaches to war have resulted in senior officers that are almost pacifistic in their approach to war; while they may have a public persona that seems offensively spirited that is not the reality when they are issuing guidance to subordinates.

20. It is clear that US Army units are employed in ways that are grossly inconsistent with sound military tactics. A contributing factor is that too many generals will not lead by example on the battlefield. For example they do not establish forward command posts to exercise tactical command of major operations—whenever we conducted brigade operations RC (S) did not establish communications with us as doctrine and tradition requires—we established it with them. Furthermore RC (S) was incapable of establishing a forward field command post to support operations in Marjah. As a young captain during Operation JUST CAUSE I saw senior leaders who routinely commanded their formations from forward positions—contrast that today with senior leaders who prefer to conduct “battlefield circulation” in areas that are so safe that body armor is not required.

21. Related to the emphasis on the population and ignoring an improved capability against the enemy is the contempt for technology. Much of what MG Flynn claimed to be intelligence shortfalls can be resolved through the aggressive use of the information technology that already exists within the DOD. Honesty Traces of cached Blue Force Tracker information can be used to show patterns and how we affect the environment - this absolutely contributes to an ability to avoid IEDs and make a better estimate of future enemy action. The integration of air-ground

digital systems reduces the potential of fratricide and can one day soon allow ground units to mark suspected civilian locations reducing the potential for CIVCAS from aerial attacks. Powerful data basing and data mining can lead to an extensive civil-military operations picture. Our uniformed military leaders are so inexperienced in close combat and some are bordering on being elderly they simply do not have the experience to evaluate the relevance of new technologies and they lack the necessary willingness to implement real change that is relevant for this war. A successful military comes out of a war better organized and equipped—our Army was completely different and far more capable at the end of the Revolution, Civil War, WW I, and WW II. In the DOD-era there has been little substantive organizational change beyond that necessary to win short duration combat operations—major threats to our nation such as we face today go unchallenged because uniformed Army leaders will not adapt. We are far behind where we should be and this has contributed to increased American deaths and non-combatant casualties while our enemy retains freedom of movement and maneuver locally, regionally, and internationally.

22. The willingness to combat an enemy cannot be turned on and off like a light switch. Leaders are willing to conduct operations at the tactical and operational levels of war to *decisively* defeat the enemy or they are not. Soldiers join the military today to protect the United States, yet they are told once in Afghanistan that we are fighting for the Afghan people—*this is a rather mercenary outlook and ignores the fact that the United States was attacked September 11, 2001*. If we have an Army led by people unwilling to defeat a disorganized illiterate adversary such as we face today, even after a despicable surprise attack on our nation, there is little hope that we can defeat a modern sophisticated enemy that we may face in the future.

23. POC is the undersigned at [REDACTED] il.



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