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The American University in Cairo
School of Public Affairs and Public Policy

B is for Burka, C is for Counterinsurgency: US Troops Experiences of and with Afghan
Society

A Thesis Submitted to
Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women's Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

by Sarah Cosette

(under the supervision of Dr. Jennifer Yvette Terrell)
May 2013

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ABSTRACT

Since 2001, members of the U.S. military and Afghan communities have been living alongside each other as part of the international political intervention and military campaign Operation Enduring Freedom. A schism occurred between Afghan societies in relation to this involvement, which in turn produced relationships between foreign troops and Afghan civilians, the state apparatus and insurgents. An international discourse of propaganda using gender as a tool surrounded the conflict and attempted to justify the presence of foreign militaries in Afghanistan by framing the U.S. as rescuers, liberating Afghan victims from Afghan oppressors. A counterinsurgency doctrine was developed after Afghanistan resisted the international hegemonic vision for the country, asking troops to battle for the hearts and minds of Afghans. U.S. troops' reflections about their experiences in Afghanistan reveal a division in how these roles and relationships are imagined in the propaganda and doctrine and how they are experienced by the U.S. military's service members. The relationship with Afghan communities is problematized and given context in this project as remembered and perceived by the U.S. troops. Representations were deconstructed and reconstructed by the troops revealing the perception of themselves and Afghans, the roles of the groups and the impact of foreign military presence in Afghanistan. Their identities develop while attempting to encourage hegemonic visions in the uniform of a foreign military other. U.S. troops' perceptions are heavily influenced by media, propaganda and discourse, yet the reflections on their own experiences often question and challenge the realities of relationships between Afghans and themselves, blurring the lines between liberation and occupation.

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1. Introduction

United States (U.S.) troops based in Afghanistan are witnessing their international military allies leave the country, nation by nation as the foreign led intervention Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), which commenced in 2001, draws to a theoretic end (Alfsen, 2011, p.15). It has been the longest war the United States has fought, while Afghanistan has only experienced intermittent absences from the playbooks of both modern and ancient foreign militaries and imperialists (Kreisher, 2013; Bearden, 2001). The most recent intervention into Afghanistan placed U.S. troops alongside Afghan society, producing interactions and segmentation between U.S. service members and the population within the country known for this project as base-host relationships. A societal split has taken place, as some Afghans have become part of the state apparatus invented by the international community after the 2001 invasion, such as the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) (Baron, 2013). Others are part of a political and combative opposition to foreign presence. Being comprised mostly of those loyal to the Taliban, the establishment that was ousted by the invasion, they are labeled insurgents by the U.S. and other foreign troops (Samples 2008). The final group discussed is made up of Afghan civilians, who are portrayed as the basis and need for the conflict (Abu-Lughod 2002). Both sides of the fight, U.S. troops and insurgents, have tried to gain this groups' allegiance while the conflict has consequently brought collateral damage to their communities (Bose 2013). U.S. troops experiences with and descriptions of these groups challenge and confirm the expectations for these interactions whether in opposition or defense of the U.S. led intervention. Today, the war continues and critics claim defeat on

a number of levels including governance and base host relationships. Afghans are divided over identities of support, neutrality and opposition to the foreign militaries and insurgency that often change on a daily basis during this conflict. U.S. troops are tasked with attempting a mission with a fluid host often resulting in a major loss of blood and economic treasure. U.S. troops have also become confused over insurgent's inability to submit to their presence while Afghan civilians and the Western formed Afghan government and security forces are both indifferent to, and participate with, (dis)loyalty to the hegemonic vision. The following vignette was offered by Golf, a participant in this study on the relationship between U.S. military members and Afghan society, demonstrating the tension within these players' relationships.

"We almost had a real serious incident...Afghans are very, very rough on all animals, dogs included. They don't really value animals at all." However, it was common for U.S. forces to adopt orphaned dogs in Afghanistan to live on base with them. On both deployments, Golf's base had dogs that were raised up from abandoned puppies on garbage and MRE's (Military issued food- Meals Ready to Eat). "We fed and raised them." But he explained that all the dogs hated the Afghans and only trusted you if you were in a U.S. uniform. The dogs would bark and growl at Afghan employees and military and he explained the Americans wouldn't stop the dogs' hostilities and thought it was instead funny. One interpreter was attacked by a dog that "took a good chunk out of him." A Special Forces member came to the scene and sent the dog away. After the interpreter thanked the American for saving him from the dog, the soldier punched him, knocking the interpreter to the ground. One evening the platoon was off base but the Afghans and dogs remained. When the U.S. troops returned, they found one of their two dogs dead and the other with its paws cut off. "By the time someone rational got on the radio the platoon was back in the base and had the entire Afghan security force zip cuffed on their knees, ready to execute the entire thing." They were eventually talked down from what Golf saw as being a potentially very bad situation, "over a dog." (Golf)

This story perhaps reflects the wider imagination for what troops would like to achieve or perceive what they are able to achieve as a foreign military in Afghanistan if they rescue, feed and defend Afghanistan's people. But this bond and loyalty is not formed through foreign intervention. It also is telling of what

happens to Afghans when they work alongside the U.S. or are perceived as favoring their presence. One of the more troubling issues brought up in this experience demonstrated the tensions within the relationship between U.S. and Afghan troops. Out of all the relationships amongst the groups, this one is seen as crucial to the hegemonic vision as these two groups are suppose to be working together in official cooperation.

Gender was used to represent and define Afghanistan in order to define the geopolitical relationship that has taken place since the buildup to the war. These emotional portrayals attempted to offer an explanation to why the U.S. believed they were justified in the invasion and then stayed to state build alongside its allies. This representation was used to highlight the differences between U.S. and Afghan society through an orientalist lens as well as portray the country as a gendered dichotomy a female victims and male villains. Afghan men were represented through depictions of the Taliban, holding them responsible and offered a rather limited scope of the complex male identities in Afghanistan who shaped the political process or gender policies in the country before and during the war. Women were brought to the forefront of this portrayal and were defined, as victims who would only continue to be oppressed without Western intervention. Intervention and the subsequent state building were portrayed as a way to displace this report's interpretation of gender oppression. Hegemonic and foreign interactions were supported by the notion that gender justice could be gained through war. Interaction was purported to be a solution to this representation (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

These representations of gender fixated on the absence of women in the Afghan public sphere and equated this with oppression. Common conclusions include that they were invisible and inactive when in public because they wore burkas. Some believed that foreign intervention would liberate these women to the point of removing their covers. However many continued to wear them and this signified a complication in understanding the offered gender narrative in Afghanistan, revealing that the representations of gender were based on a limited context. As for the men, the narratives offered had failed to mention the identities and actions of Afghan men outside of the Taliban who aided foreign powers. Many of these men were responsible for brutality to women since before the war began and continue these methods today (Kolhatkar and Ingalls, 2006, p. 115-116). However, this was a strategic ignorance as their assistance was essential for the military and state building efforts. These alliances ignored women's issues, instead marketing blame on women's oppression on the enemy. Women's lives in Afghanistan were packaged into a narrative that supported foreign and allied Afghan visions, still making women absent. The intervention claimed this was a liberating act for women but in order to do so, they abused men deemed enemies. When gender justice is focused on women, it overlooks gender-based violence against men and ignores gender as a category for proper treatment of people not just women. In the case of the Afghan war, many of these men deemed enemies have been tortured and imprisoned without formal charges or rights as prisoners as they are considered terrorists, a category used to dehumanize those involved in political conflicts (Roth, 2004, p. 2-7; Puar and

Rai, 2002, p. 117-148). Institutional rights were granted to women through the state building process such as representation in the government and wider access to healthcare and education. Freedom gained is hard to measure. First because the effects of war have a tremendous effect on women and deeper social practices; and security concerns have continued to limit their involvement in the public sphere. Second, their immense impact and involvement in the private sphere is overlooked and not always seen as valuable. Progress claimed by invasion or that women's agony somehow ended with the fall of the Taliban is shortsighted and fulfilling to those who support the intervention. With foreign presence in the country since the war it is difficult to predict how realistic these claims are of Afghan progress as they are inorganic and will inevitably change after foreign withdrawal. Hegemonic politics while claiming to elevate women's rights; actually avoids them or exploits them when making war (Barakat and Wardell, 2002). "As is often the case, the increased militarization of Afghan society made women more subject to violence than at any time before" (Hirschkind and Mahmood, 2002, p. 345).

Foreign troops representations of self and Afghan society are built through this interaction they have experienced as participants in the war. Experiences offer a limited scope of understanding gender and societal narratives although their representations are valuable in that they complicate and reaffirm the narratives describing this interaction and descriptions. They have their own of interpretations of society and gender with descriptions built on their interactions with Afghan society as opposed to laying groundwork for justification of the war

as previous representations had offered. These are different representations of gender, power and community outside of the public representations. Most of the troops surveyed and interviewed experience a higher ratio of interactions with men. A description of interaction or assistance to women was shown as indirect. This revealed that this attention to women's issues was absent despite how it was marketed. These interactions affected how they characterized Afghans and ultimately affected their opinions, creating a cycle that would continue to affect their interactions with and memories of Afghan society. Troops' representations of Afghans reveal orientalist descriptions and a variation of trying to understand the other through a lens of occupation. These descriptions explain how foreign presence is impacted by gender representations and vice versa through the interactions between foreign troops and Afghan society. It offers an expansion to how it is popularly imagined reported and represented.

The war has placed these incongruent and unfamiliar communities working in conflict and cooperation together, while popular discourses surrounding these dealings have deployed gender as a tool to describe and suggest the expectations for interaction between them (Cloud, 2004). Two public discourses emerged under this military campaign; propaganda claiming liberation, meant to justify the incursion into Afghanistan and a counterinsurgency policy that asked U.S. troops to win Afghan's hearts and minds (Exum 2011). These discourses portrayed Afghan society and U.S. troops via a gendered lens to oversimplify the contact, and ultimately the conflict and cooperation between these players, ignoring the complex gender dynamics, identities and histories of

Afghans and U.S. troops. These imagined descriptions placed the U.S. troops in a role describing them as a force of good guys attempting to heroically rescue and liberate Afghan society from a sovereign regime described as villainous bad guys. Afghan society was often reduced to a one-dimensional victim with visual descriptions and commentary focusing on the country's burka covered female population to prove that supposition (Abu-Lughod, 2002). The society's empowerment was then further seen as dependent on counterinsurgency policies, claiming that Afghan advancement and cooperation could be achieved based on how troops interacted with Afghan's hearts and minds.

To a certain extent the conversations and expectations are projected and discussed by outsiders and those in power. Whether it is amongst popular U.S. society or high ranking U.S. military commanders, they are outside of the sphere and general experience that U.S. troops have working (in)directly with Afghan society through base host relationships. This thesis argues that both foreign troops (U.S. and its allies) and Afghan people are part of a gendered representation in the discourse and have little access to the political process while being direct players, defying and embodying the rhetoric as well as serving as symbols and scapegoats of why progress is or is not made in the Afghan war. This argument was established through comparisons to similar historical patterns where foreign militaries attempted to develop nations based on their country's perceptions and policies while convincing local populations they were occupying, colonized or invaded in order to support them (Spivak, 1988). U.S. troops in Afghanistan form identities as both the other and agents of a hegemonic

strategy. Narratives of their perceptions and experiences with Afghan society reflect a depiction that contradicts, challenges and reflects gender representations and expectations imagined by two popular discourses based on gendered and romanticized notions of war and occupation as liberation and counterinsurgency achievable through winning Afghan hearts and minds. U.S. military member's experiences often relate a certain belief in the policy or popular discourse while revealing the belief that it is an uphill battle and possibly unachievable due to the fluid nature of their relationships and personal opinions about Afghan society.

Through interviews and an online survey, veterans and active U.S. military offered their understanding of these dynamics against the gendered backdrop of liberation and the hearts and minds campaign. To secure anonymity, I replaced the names of the most active participants in this thesis with names from the military alphabet system, Alpha through Yankee and collectively refer to them as Alpha Yankee.

Since troops are often talked about but have little access to the main discourse, their voice is crucial to better understanding the sociology of war. This thesis aims at describing their perceptions and experiences concerning their affect and interaction with Afghan communities and the Afghans effect on the troops and their roles and responsibilities. U.S. military members serving abroad are in a unique historical position within the context of international relations. When developing the project, I wanted to speak with current military members and veterans of the Afghan War since 2001. In order to understand these

equations better, I developed a fieldwork process to ascertain how U.S. troops characterized their presence and role within the war. Through online surveys and different methods of interview, I was able to collect data that renegotiates the perceived gendered equations that designates U.S. troops as a foreign force in Afghanistan.

Those that did participate in the surveys and interviews served in all years of the war until 2011 as well as every region within Afghanistan. There were forty-eight participants that completed the survey, with about fifteen of those deciding to participate in some form of the interview process as well. Interviews were conducted in person, over the phone and through emails. While mostly men participated, a few women also responded. The most dominant age range when serving in Afghanistan was 18-23, most of which were 24-29 at the time of the survey. Each participant had different roles within the war and experiences with Afghan people and these interactions were reflected in their memory sometimes from experiences that occurred months or years earlier.

Attitudes towards the study were both positive and negative. Many of the participants were excited to give their viewpoints on a part of the Afghan narrative that they felt rarely gets discussed or understood outside the propaganda and policy. Some of the troops questioned the motives of the study and were unsure of why many of the questions asked about Afghans and their society. Negative reactions ranged from unwillingness to respond citing national security to a fear this study would place unnecessary stress on troops with the

only goal being to further my career. In the end, those that did participate provided valuable insight into the ideas being discussed in this thesis.

This thesis will contain five additional chapters that delve into the history, process and analysis of the gendered descriptions of these groups, public discourses and U.S. troop perceptions of the Afghan war. Following this introduction, a brief history will be given regarding Afghanistan and its current societal structures and conflicts, U.S. imperialism and discourse, as well as prior interactions these two nations have had that has played a role in the development of the topics being discussed. An analysis of relevant literature on liberation, counterinsurgency, and how gender roles were imagined and represented in this conflict, being discussed to provide readers context of prior work relevant to this study. A section stating my procedures for this study, including the survey and interview process, will also be provided. Once a background has been established, original research discovered through the surveys and interviews will be given and analyzed. This study breaks down the troop's experiences into two chapters, liberation and counterinsurgency, in an effort to challenge U.S. policy and actions. As the thesis concludes, a final analysis will be given tying relevant historical facts, prior literature as well as current discourse and policies to that of troop's experiences in the Afghan conflict. These connections will help add to the discussion of problems that arise from foreign intervention and imperialistic pursuits under the guise of liberation

2. Discourse, Roles and Relationships

This study examines the relationships between U.S. troops, Afghan civilians, insurgents and state agents. Each of these groups plays an important role within the dynamics and relationships of the conflict. These base host relationships place U.S. troops as a foreign other in Afghanistan while wearing the military uniform of a global hegemonic power. This chapter offers literature that depicts and critiques the justification for this war as well as the policies and discourses formed to fulfill their goals. As this study identifies relationships and applies them to the discourses attempting to direct each group, it is important to understand their backgrounds. Both the propaganda describing liberation and counterinsurgency doctrine attempting to win hearts and minds built expectations around the relationships between Afghan society and U.S. troops. These discourses used gender as a frame to describe the roles within these base host relationships. The notions of liberation and hearts and minds will be deconstructed within the Afghan theatre, both offering and critiquing them with literature that problematizes and maintains these concepts to provide a foundation for the narratives and perceptions of research participants.

2.1 Justification for Intervention

On September 11, 2001, hijackers overtook four civilian commercial flights and crashed them into the Pentagon in Virginia and the twin towers of the World

Trade Center in New York City. The subsequent deaths that took place from the building's fires and collapse were etched and experienced not only by the eyewitnesses but those who experienced it through broadcasts around the world. It was a shock to America's citizenry and quickly sent the public and government scrambling to respond to who was responsible for the attacks. Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader had his foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil issue a statement the day of the attacks on behalf of Omar saying "We denounce this terrorist attack, whoever is behind it" ("CNN"). However, despite the condolences and denial of any support in the attack, the U.S. discourse portrayed the Afghan nationalist regime to be synonymous and in close affiliation with al-Qaeda, an international terrorist network who ultimately took responsibility for the attack. Al-Qaeda operated through a global network, but their leader Osama bin Laden was based in Afghanistan. As events continued to unfold, the perpetrators and their actions began to be defined. David Frum, President George W. Bush's speechwriter, described the U.S. administration's take on the events:

Within 48 hours, [Bush] had made the two key decisions that have defined the war on terror. First, this is a war, not a crime. And second, this war is not going to be limited to just the authors of the 9/11 attack but to anyone who assisted them and helped them and made their work possible, including states. And that is a dramatic, dramatic event. And that defines everything. (Kirk)

While U.S. political discourse and media were sorting out their versions of who the perpetrators were to these acts of terror, they were also defining the roles and reasoning for invading Afghanistan. The United States further reinforced that they perceived the terrorist act as war and not a crime when they launched their response militarily and not judicially. In the fall of 2001, George

Bush announced a Global War on Terror (GWOT), Afghanistan being the first campaign (Bush, 2001). On October 7th, 2001, combat operations began under the campaign Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). By November of that year the United States was establishing their first ground bases within Afghanistan (Brown 2012). A series of victories early in the campaign led the United States to believe they had triumphed and that their liberation of Afghanistan was progressing as planned when they ousted the Taliban from power. Bush had described GWOT as a “crusade,” making some suspect this was a wider war on Islam although this was officially denied and said to be a mistaken description (Bush, 2001).

The United States pursued its goal in the invasion and political relationship thereafter with the assistance of the Northern Alliance, the Taliban's domestic rival, as well as a comprehensive commitment of logistical and combat support from the international community. The Northern Alliance while the underdog in Afghan de facto leaderships at the time, were actually remnants of the massive network of warlords and corruption that had wreaked havoc on the country prior to the Taliban's vigilante movement and consequential takeover of Afghanistan (Conetta, 2012). Instead, a new government would be formed in Bonn, Germany, which would exclude the Taliban and put anti-Taliban warlords in positions of official and unofficial power. With the U.S. military taking root in the country, it was not always clear where this new government, lead by Hamid Karzai, would rank in the power structure of Afghanistan (Suhrke, 2007; Ferguson, 2007; Hehir, 2007).

To understand the current relationship between U.S. troops and Afghan society it is important to understand that while the U.S. framed their launch on Afghanistan as where this global war on terror would take place, they were also entering and taking sides in a civil war in the country. While many reasons behind the war were geopolitical, they were portrayed as liberation and often on behalf of Afghan women. It is important to understand how gender and geopolitics related to one another within the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and the U.S. government. For many Afghans, the Taliban was a new direction for the country and a much-needed response to the widespread turmoil of the Afghan/Soviet conflict in the 1980s and then civil war that proceeded when they came to power in the mid 1990's. Over their tenure the Taliban were criticized for the strictness that that they asserted to form a more perfect union, free from the unrest and exploitation by Afghan warlords who had a far worse human rights track record and are a part of the current Afghan government leadership. Throughout their codes of conduct they were severe on curbing pedophilia, rape, kidnapping and the mutilation of women and rates of these occurrences steadily dropped (Rashid, 2001). Alas, their vigilante-gendered justice was not picked up by airwaves as much as their preventing women from leaving their homes, institutionalized veiling, including the head to toe burka garment and closing their schools. Schools, the Taliban said, were not to be closed permanently, but would rather be opened only when a new national curriculum was developed and the streets were safer. The community support to standing up to the warlords became backlash when new formed boundaries proved unpopular (Rashid,

2001). While these practices were fluid depending on the security and presence of Taliban armed forces in the area, they were publicly associated with misogyny and extremism. Often, they were frustrated by ignorance to their reasoning and claimed outsiders needed to improve their understanding of Afghanistan; they believed their actions revered women and were quite the opposite (Murphy, 2010). The Taliban's noted victories included the overwhelming total reduction in drug cultivation and trade as well as cutting down on weapons stockpiling by civilians (Rashid, 2001).

Concurrently, Osama Bin Laden, after being expelled from Saudi Arabia and African countries took refuge in Afghanistan. As the leader of al-Qaeda, his U.S. opposition network attacked U.S. diplomatic and military installations overseas prior to 9/11 in reaction to U.S. military efforts and bases in the Middle East and their support in the creation of Israel. Bin Laden had relocated his network to Afghanistan before the Taliban came to power. He had previously fought alongside the mujahedeen in the Soviet/Afghan conflict and was welcomed and hosted by an Afghan warlord. Under the honor code of Pashtunwali, Pashtun Afghans honor relied on concepts of hospitality, forgiveness, sanctuary and revenge (Coll, 2001). The Taliban came across Bin Laden in their country as they came to power, and accepted that he was to remain a protected guest under Pashtunwali until the international governments who he had terrorized were able to submit proof and would grant a fair Islamic trial. They considered Osama Bin Laden an issue that they inherited instead of encouraging his presence as commonly portrayed. They believed that the

amount of attention the United States gave him only fanned the flames of his popularity and encouraged his group Al Qaeda (Stanglin, 2013). Some analysts critique the Taliban for what they describe as harboring terrorist networks and leaders. Some attribute much of the problem to the fact that the United States did not give the Afghan government fair opportunities or listen to requests that would've been granted to other international states.

The Taliban would cease to be described as a government ruling over Afghanistan but rather part of an opposing masculinity to the United States, grouped together with Al Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden, and other terrorists groups that would form the Afghan opposition after the 9/11 attacks. This collection of ideals, cultures and goals no matter how different would now be linked as one of terrorism in the eyes of the United States government (Bush 2001).

While Afghanistan was heavily represented through female victimhood, the portrayal of Afghan men is equally important, and needs to be deconstructed. The villainization of men through the descriptions offered about the Taliban seemed to package the woes of the country and conveniently placed responsibility with the group. This was accomplished through a rendering that described the group and the United States soon-to-be enemy in war as men having anachronistic masculinities and medieval policies and sourced this with their interpretation of Islam. This served to discount Afghanistan's complicated political history, dehumanizing them as the source of any backwards qualities that came to symbolize the country and validate the reason for intervention. "The Taliban in many ways have become a potent symbol of all that liberal public

opinion regards as grievously wrong with Islamic societies these days, proof of the intense misogyny long ascribed to Islam, and most emphatically to those movements within Islam referred to as fundamentalist.” (Hirschkind and Mahmood, 2002, p. 342) By showing them as anachronistic and fundamentalists these discourses developed a strong sensibility they could be rejected by those that considered themselves modern and advance. Misogyny was shown as synonymous with Islamic fundamentalism, and an explanation of the group’s gender policies were combined with a convenient dishonesty to source the country’s poverty and strife on the shoulders of the regime. “From the rubble left behind by the game of super power politics played out on Afghan bodies and communities, we can only identify the misogynist machinations of the Islamic fundamentalist that testifies to the power this image bears, and the force it exerts on our political imagination” (Hirschkind and Mahmood, 2002, p. 342). As the authors also state, these representations of men also provide a scapegoat that is able to overlook the actions of both US and Afghan society outside of this group who have significantly contributed to harm against Afghanistan’s women (Hirschkind and Mahmood, 2002, p. 341). “The male protector confronts evil aggressors in the name of the right and the good, while those under his protection submit to his order and serve as handmaids to his efforts” (Young, 2003, p. 17). In making war plans the U.S. was strategic in building Afghan alliances in order to invade and intervene. Pashtunwali, the ethnic majority’s code of conduct, was refuted when the U.S. cast this ideology out when refusing to engage in the Bin Laden negotiations after 9/11, using it as way to understand

why Bin Laden had refuge in Afghanistan as well as how to prosecute him and avoid a massive war. This code was dismissed and instead grouped as part of the representation that suggested an orientalist, villainous and archaic masculinity was solely responsible for troubles in Afghanistan. Pashtunwali and a focus on tribal allegiances, while given limited respect by leaders and teachers in culture awareness training, was commonly thought of as the most successful allegiance and had an incredible importance in how troops witnessed and participated in base host relationships. (Ross, 2010, p. 25)

To gain support for the war and to use as justification for their actions, the United States government and media described the global war on terror by claiming anyone who fit their idea of a terrorist would be in the crosshairs. The Taliban's dismissal and the refusal of the U.S. to negotiate with them as a legitimate Afghan government with a voice was further reinforced when described by popular discourse. Through portraying Afghan society as a dichotomy of *villain* and *victim*, the war was framed through a propaganda claiming liberation as the opposite of terrorism. This would further reinforce justification for intervention and a need for a heroic force to *liberate* Afghan society from *terrorists*. Upon the invasion, American troops were portrayed by popular discourse as rescuers of victims who could displace the *villainized* power with a *courageous* power committed to the country's freedom, defense and progress. U.S. troops actions were portrayed as benevolent and a shared global need of both the U.S. and Afghans to fight and defend against oppression and terror.

In placing GWOT in Afghanistan, it justified militarily occupying the country even though Afghans were never part of the terrorism the hegemony was supposedly fighting against. Instead, these discourses claimed that the liberation of Afghanistan was attainable through fighting terrorism and state development. They ignored the complex identities and histories of Afghans and instead, simplified their portrayal of the Afghans to that of a masculine villain and feminine victim. Any opposition to the U.S. in Afghanistan was rendered as terrorism and, over the course of the intervention, was considered insurgency trying to diminish liberation efforts.

2.2 Building Policy around Women in their Absence

Afghan women and their struggles with the Taliban had been a platform of women's rights activists such as the Feminist Majority Campaign and Revolutionary Afghan Women's Association (RAWA, 2001), calling for an end to their oppression in the years before the invasion (RAWA, "About RAWA", 2001). This platform was then used and modified as propaganda for the U.S. invasion in 2001 that claimed in many ways to be on behalf of women. Both official rhetoric and popular media displayed these women to symbolize *an emasculated* Afghan society. The Taliban was symbolized as the source of the oppression and therefore villainized as the victimizer by public discourse.

Laura Bush, the wife of then U.S. President George W. Bush, addressed the nation as part of this *liberation* propaganda a month after the invasion. She opened by describing the Taliban and Al Qaeda as a misogynistic masculinity

with words like brutality, control, forbid, cruelty as responsible for the suffering of Afghan women and children. She continued to reinforce the idea that Afghan society was a dichotomy of a feminized and infantilized victim and an oppressive terrorist masculinity. She claimed that because of U.S. military efforts, women and children were now “rejoicing” as they experienced freedoms such as listening to music and learning.

Civilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror, not only because our hearts break for the women and children in Afghanistan but also because, in Afghanistan, we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us. ("Radio Address by Mrs. Bush")

These ideas helped construct the description of the U.S. military as part of the *civilized* response to the unwelcome Afghan masculinity. It also symbolized them as a necessary protective buffer to prevent the global spread of this oppressive masculinity. She claimed that the oppression of women was a central goal of terrorists and asked for support in the U.S. efforts, suggesting their intervention work was to “ensure that dignity and opportunity would be secured for all Afghan women and children.” Historically, in most cultures women have been lumped together with children, considered incapable of the “decisiveness” required to conduct international politics (Kumar and Stabile, 2005). It should be noted that in addition to the continued propaganda featuring Afghan women throughout the war, the former first lady has continued to speak on behalf of Afghan women and children plights as part of this platform.

Cynthia Enloe, an influential feminist theorist, describes the intersection of hegemonic military practices and gender:

When it's a patriarchal world that is 'dangerous', masculine men and feminine women are expected to react in opposite but complimentary ways. A 'real man'

will become the protector in such a world. He will suppress his own fears, brace himself and step forward to defend the weak, women and children. In the same 'dangerous world' women will turn gratefully and expectantly to their fathers and husbands, real or surrogate. If a woman is a mother, then she will think of her children, protecting them not in a manly way, but as a self-sacrificing mother. (*Militarization*, 12-13)

Assuming that Afghans wanted to be liberated and welcome such a force, the U.S. military invaded the country. This base host relationship study reveals that U.S. troops are confounded by not being welcome as Afghans as *liberators*.

In their article, "Unveiling Imperialism: Media, Gender and the War on Afghanistan", Carole Stabile and Deepa Kumar discuss how gender and media were used as tools within the liberation propaganda.

The central framework employed to justify the US war was thoroughly Orientalist; it constructed the West as the beacon of civilization with an obligation to tame the Islamic world and liberate its women. (Kumar and Stabile, 2005, p.766)

They hoped the image of Afghan women in burkas that inundated mainstream media would bring attention to those who had worked on Afghan women's rights during the Taliban's tenure. However, in these authors' opinions, women were merely objectified in order to construct justification for invading Afghanistan and did not better their plights. In addition, this demonstrates that when media over emphasizes women as an object for which to define a foreign society it further obscures hegemonic state building goals and makes empty commitments related to women's rights.

The foundational text about gender and the propaganda of women's liberation in Afghanistan is Lila Abu Lughod's 2002 article, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" She complicates the propaganda and its tendency to portray this war through static gendered descriptions of Muslim women. She argues:

We need to be suspicious when neat cultural icons are plastered over messier historical and political narratives, so we need to be wary when Lord Cromer in British-ruled Egypt, French ladies in Algeria, and Laura Bush, all with military troops behind them, claim to be saving or liberating Muslim women. (785)

She explains that the hegemonic powers have used foreign militaries in past colonial projects and the present Global War on Terror to respond to their differences in gender and culture while having a fairly small scope for which to understand those contexts. In Afghanistan, she describes how the burka became an icon in this war while propaganda reduced the form of veiling or “covering,” to describe part of the Taliban’s oppression. However, she questions the idea that propagandists believed women would take off the burka during this *liberation* when for so many Afghan women it is part of how they portray femininity and negotiate access in the public space. Abu Lughod doesn’t dismiss the overthrow of the Taliban but does believe women’s voices and cultural contexts have not been used in redefining and rebuilding Afghanistan since the invasion. Western tendencies to build folklore based on their own imaginations of cultural difference about the men they are fighting and the women they are liberating has only reinforced characterizations of the other and supported imperialism.

Stabile and Kumar say that the Afghan liberation propaganda combined a narrative with Orientalism to justify the foreign military presence and imperial aggression.

According to the logic of the protection scenario, women, like the penetrable, feminized territory of the nation-state, must be protected from the predatory advances of some real or imaginary enemy. (Kumar and Stabile, 2005, p. 770)

Through describing the country in need of protection as *victimized* and the Taliban regime inadequate of the country’s control as a *villain*, it created an

imagined space for a *liberator*. Stabile and Kumar support Enloe's argument that "gendered roles are created to maintain a hierarchy that keeps certain elite men at the top, often at the expense of women, children and non-elite men" (Enloe, 2001b). Popular discourse, "treat women as objects – of official policies, of cultural or of traditional practices – without acknowledging women's reactions or contributions to new laws, historic events or daily life." While women are used as objects to sell war, they are ignored in the actual policy making process. "The national political arena is a sphere for men only, for those rare women who can successfully play at being men, or at least not shake masculine presumptions" (Enloe, 2001).

Enloe discusses how foreign militaries reveal complicated sexual politics. She says that historically militaries institutionalized prostitution to improve morale, prevent local women from being raped and to control the spread of venereal diseases. In GWOT, prostitution has been unofficial as the U.S. military prohibits its practice as not to offend local communities (Enloe, 2001). However, as women have been marketed to justify this war, they have been victims while being portrayed as the site of rescue. While Afghan women are being claimed as respected and protected by the U.S. military, their own female and male comrades are being sexually assaulted at alarming rates by their fellow military members. Women's inclusion in the U.S. military has been also marketed as liberation, although it has been manipulated. A common argument is whether women should be included in combat roles as a means to equality. In 2013, the

DOD announced women would be allowed to apply for these roles, with many advocates claiming this as a milestone of progress for women (Hawkins, 2013).

Enloe reiterates this point saying that those in military leadership have “tried to camouflage women’s service to the military as women’s liberation” (Enloe, 1983). This “camouflage” has distracted the public from the effects of the foreign intervention in Afghanistan and built false notions that foreign militaries and occupied societies are supposed to work in unison towards a common goal of *liberation*. Shallow gendered descriptions of the country as feminine have further subjugated its society’s vast identities and needs. “This negation of “femininity” arises from the military’s masculine self definition. One of the bastions of masculinity in a sexist society, the military constructs male identity as being predicated on violence and combat. This stands in contrast to the notion of women as passive, away from the battlefield. However, women are not away from the battlefield and their lives are deeply affected outside of the liberation discourse. Victoria Brittain says, in the introduction of her book, *Shadow Lives*:

Afghanistan has been devastated for its own people many times over, but most of all in the most ideological and technological of wars...it was a war based on a convenient myth of Afghan responsibility for 9/11. The real Afghanistan of the shepherd boys, village wedding parties, grandmothers and babies, killed by US bombs was visible and dehumanized in a decade of its people being used for deadly experiments in enforcing Western power. (Brittain, 2013, p. 2)

These literatures show that liberation is a propaganda code word used to justify entrance into a sovereign society. Women are merely falsely marketed and their gender repackaged to further hegemonic goals as they continue to be ignored by power structures. The actual impact of foreign militaries in base host

relationships is obscured by this discourse and false definition and example of liberation.

Some communities pay the highest price: their farmland taken for bases, their children neurologically damaged by military jet fuel in their water supplies, their neighbors imprisoned, tortured and disappeared... (Lutz, 2009, p. 4)

These are the actual effects of occupation that complicate the idea that foreign militaries and hegemonic visions bring liberation through their efforts.

Afghans mounting tensions to Operation Enduring Freedom and the newly formed Afghan government as well as the GWOT's attention shifting to Iraq, supported a rise in insurgency, most notable those affiliated with the Taliban. The U.S. eventually transitioned to changing their methods into counterinsurgency as liberation, which proved elusive. The Afghans had been placed in a stagnant, gendered description and dragged into this fight that by a portrayal that a foreign force could liberate them from terrorism. When this notion did not take root, the counterinsurgency policy claimed that their empowerment was the goal and not pacification as these doctrines had been described during colonialism. Just as the propaganda of liberation was portrayed as being on behalf of women, this counterinsurgency plan claimed to be on behalf of Afghan civilians to foster a better cooperation and relationship between them, foreign militaries and the Afghan state and militaries, ridding the country of insurgents (Jones, 2009).

2.3 Finding a Place with Liberation and Counterinsurgency

Although the Iraq and Afghanistan interventions were both targeted during the GWOT, they have unique histories and qualities making it at times helpful to link them, while other times detrimental due to the tendency to symbolize them

together. In both arenas, a recycled policy was spun through both the military and media that in order for the United States and its allies to triumph in the GWOT, the hearts and minds of locals would be the described goal. Once it was clear the U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies would be staying longer than planned, a new approach needed to be established to respond to the insurgency. “America arguably intended its forces to occupy briefly, transform local politics in Wilsonian fashion, and then depart” (Calder, 2007).

General Sir Gerald Templer coined the term to describe Britain’s apparently successful counterinsurgency campaign in Malaya (1948-60). He stated, “The answer [to the uprising] lies not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the people” (Dixon, 2009). In military terminology it is better understood as counterinsurgency doctrine. Laileh Khalil defines counterinsurgency as asymmetrical warfare by a powerful military against irregular combatants supported by a civilian population. Troops were encouraged to take a softer approach to encountering civilians in Afghanistan in order to gain support for their mission. They were told that although this may result in the loss of more American life initially, the long term effect would be overall progress and gains in the fight against insurgents and Taliban fighters (“The New and Old” 14-23). This “battle” also made for better public relations as citizens from the U.S. and from the allied nations were showing frustration at the progress. This counterinsurgency method was founded in research and had been unsuccessful for past militaries fighting insurgencies globally. As an overall understanding,

wars of counterinsurgency cannot likely be won by foreign armies. However, top military officials and social scientists encouraged the softer approach and expected their service members to embrace its style (Petraeus and Amos,2006). Commanders have disagreed that the method should be used and troops resent it citing the confusion on whether the priority is on U.S., Afghan or human life (Boal, 2011). This concern is compounded by their fellow service members' deaths, perceived as a direct result in the change in policy and the frustration and exhaustion from the thirteen-year war. The need to be more respectful to a country that was *villianized* and *emasculated* to them in the first place additionally makes soldiers skeptical.

The war in Afghanistan from the position of foreign troops is fought through counterinsurgency. In this situation, foreign troops are not fighting a traditional military but against insurgents from the local populace. In Afghanistan, insurgents are comprised of Taliban fighters; civilian members and most recently, allied Afghan security forces. Their reason for insubordination to the international direction and presence ranges significantly. Counterinsurgency aims to reduce insurgency and gain the support of the local population pursuing goals for the reconstruction and future of Afghanistan designed by global leaders and alliances (Petraeus and Amos, 2006). Semantically supportive of the foreign mission is the "Battle to Win the Hearts and Minds of the Afghan People." General David Petraeus, of the U.S. Army, honed in and promoted this policy in his modern take on the United States' counterinsurgency operations in the U.S. Army Field Manual FM-324. This publication, written in 2006, is seen as the

seminal literature and a new way forward in current and future conflicts with insurgents. Its objectives are to demonstrate to military members engaged in this conflict how to steer the population's support of foreign presence and goals away from those who are attempting to overthrow foreign presence. Neither insurgents nor counterinsurgents can "win" without the support of the population and that is where victories are won according to this theory. This theory also creates a trilateral equation of competing for indigenous support. This can be achieved, supposedly, through lower impact fighting. While the initial loss of foreign military life is expected initially, support eventually will favor the outsider and what they have to offer the society.

Nagl, an important voice in modern military that contributed to FM-324, says this about the report:

The doctrinal manual was built around two big ideas: first, that protecting the population was the key to success in any counterinsurgency campaign, and second, that to succeed in counterinsurgency, an army has to be able to learn and adapt more rapidly than its enemies. (Nagl, 2012)

David Galula, a historical military author of French citizenry, was born in Tunisia and raised in Casablanca. FM-324 was built on his understanding of counterinsurgency known for such publications like the 1950s, "Pacification of Algeria," for the RAND Corporation. He introduces his influential report, "Counterinsurgency Warfare Theory and Practice" by saying the following about war, "War is not a chess game but a vast social phenomenon with an infinitely greater and ever expanding number of variables, some of which elude analysis." (Galula, 1964, p. 9) When discussing the division in a society between insurgents and civilians, he notes:

The population represents this new ground. If the insurgent manages to dissociate the population from the counterinsurgent, to control it physically, to get its active support, he will win the war because, in the final analysis, the exercise of political power depends on the tacit or explicit agreement of the population or, at worst, on its submissiveness. (Galula, 1964, pg. 6)

Kilcullen, a modern influential theorist and former Australian military member, applies the counterinsurgency as reflected in conflicts in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Politically, in many cases today, the counterinsurgent represents revolutionary change, while the insurgent fights to preserve the status quo of ungoverned spaces, or to repel an occupier — a political relationship opposite to that envisaged in classical counterinsurgency. Pakistan's campaign in Waziristan since 2003 exemplifies this. The enemy includes Al-Qa'ida (AQ) linked extremists and Taliban, but also local tribesmen fighting to preserve their traditional culture against 21st century encroachment. The problem of weaning these fighters away from extremist sponsors, while simultaneously supporting modernization, does somewhat resemble pacification in traditional counterinsurgency. But it also echoes colonial campaigns, and includes entirely new elements arising from the effects of globalization. (Kilcullen, 2010; p. 3)

In responding to Kilcullen's reading of the hearts and minds concept, scholar Laleh Khalili says:

This is the true meaning of the phrase "hearts and minds," which comprises two separate components. "Hearts," means persuading people their best interest are served by your success. "Minds" means convincing them that you can protect them and that resisting you is pointless. Note that neither has to do with whether people like you. Calculated self-interest, not emotion, is what counts. ("The New and Old" 15)

She says that counterinsurgency is practiced through a gendered dichotomy of the civilian as feminine and the combatant or insurgent as masculine. Also, counterinsurgency is perceived by those in support and defiance of it as a feminine and civilized approach to the more destructive masculine approach.

The binary categorization which forms the basis of mainstream discourses about war, civilian (feminine) is the opposite of combatant (masculine). Moreover, we know that the discursive practices surrounding war also reproduce extant gendered hierarchies through the constant reproduction of a dichotomous rhetoric of masculinities and femininities. ("The New and Old" 17)

However, as the liberation propaganda showed us, the tendency to dichotomize gender in hearts and minds as well explains that it continues to be the tool of war, further reinforcing designations as understood by outsiders while ignoring the complexities of society in Afghanistan. She goes on to explain:

A more complicated set of gendering practices occurs not at the endpoint of application of counterinsurgency force, but at the seam of encounter between the occupying military forces and the people subjected to counterinsurgency. This seam is the messy interstitial space in which the cross-hatching of race, gender, class, and empire all produce unexpected hierarchical positioning. ("Gendered Practices" 11)

The analytical chapters (4 and 5) will illustrate the U.S. troops perspectives were challenged and maintained these discourses of liberation and counterinsurgency. Their experiences on the ground did not always reflect what those in power had asked them to accomplish. While they were at the bottom of the U.S. military hierarchy, they were placed at the top of a power hierarchy of foreign troops based in Afghan society acting out the hegemonic mission. However, they saw their presence challenged and had trouble accepting why liberation was unwelcomed by so many. Their preceding descriptions of these relationships show how conditions and confusions within these affiliations are far outside the discourses of liberation and hearts and minds.

3. Methodology

Outsiders have portrayed Afghanistan in discourse and doctrine as a war that was described and built, won or lost through the relationships between U.S. troops and Afghan society. United States military members serving abroad are in a unique historical position within the context of international relations. I felt it was a natural progression to explore this relationship from U.S. sources that experienced it firsthand, albeit a limited scope until Afghan perspectives are attained, to better understand the sociology of war. When developing the project, I wanted to speak with active military members and veterans of the Afghan War. My research site was in the United States, the troops' home base away from the Afghan arena from 2011 until 2012. This chapter will explain the methodological processes involved in this research including its development, implementation, response and analysis. The survey questions used will be provided followed by how interviewees were chosen and what questions they would be asked. This section will also look into who took the survey as well as reasoning for resistance to the questioning by others.

As the surveys and interviews were being conducted, the situation in Afghanistan was constantly changing. Headlines in the media were updating the public and the troops back in the United States as to the progress of the war. Just before my interview with Alpha, General McChrystal had been dismissed for his comments in *Rolling Stone* magazine about President Barrack Obama and the military efforts in Afghanistan (Wilson and Shear). Many of the interviewees spoke of their dissatisfaction when asked about the media's coverage and

portrayal of troops. "I was sick and tired of hearing media reports that seemed inaccurate, that were not the full story. I want to go and have my own story, my own story to tell my family," stated Bravo. The troops who took the survey, and for those that participated in the interviews, each had a chance to tell their own stories. Their perspectives could be recorded on a variety of topics without outside influence or censorship providing a unique glimpse from one side of the Afghan conflict. These insights into the minds of the troops on the ground are important when explaining the actions and intentions of a group that usually has no voice other than ones given to them by their government and media.

It should be remembered that these reflections are given by men and women based on their memories when in their home country after there is space and time between them and Afghanistan. Some of them would return in the future while others would not, either because they had retired or would be based in another country, part of the U.S. base expanse. When asked what was a major concern that needed to be addressed in the current lives of U.S. troops and veterans, an overwhelming amount brought up post-traumatic stress disorder and said that many of them suffered it. PTSD, as it is commonly referred to, is defined by the Mayo Clinic online as: ". . . a mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event" (MayoClinic.com). The highest risk factor for men is combat exposure, and this health concern has also been used to represent U.S. military members in the public discourse. However just as gender was repackaged to fit

a narrative of support for Operation Enduring Freedom, this issue has been used to stereotype troops offering little context and reduces them to crazy or dangerous. This discourages troops from seeking treatment for fear of being stigmatized by a description that some may perceive as a weakness. If the effects of war include PTSD for U.S. troops, then it surely there is also a feature in Afghan society, given that Afghans have experienced wars for generations. However, it is considered a western construct that is primarily discussed as it pertains to troops and is void of including and discussing the health of the other half of this base host relationship, the individuals and communities of nations in conflict with the US who are also deeply affected by war.

3.1 The Survey

Base host politics, as they are called within international relations and political science literatures, are complex relationships between a foreign military, such as the U.S. and the national society where they are stationed or hosted (Cooley, 2008, p. 18). This foreign presence and the relationship that results vary based on numerous factors including the association and agreement between the two or more governments involved, regions, cultures and whether or not they are involved in a war. Nonprobability sampling techniques were utilized to identify the study group. Expert sampling was used to provide viewpoints from those with actual experience with the subject matter. While viewpoints from the general public and non-troop groups may have provided some information on the subject, the most effective way to extract data was to go directly to the source.

The troops surveyed would have firsthand knowledge of the situations being questioned. Snowball sampling was also used when expanding survey and interview participation. Contacts such as university liaisons for active and veteran troops would refer me to other groups that might be interested in the study. Troops were commonly in contact with other service members that they had served with in Afghanistan. These connections would prove to be a good way of spreading the survey to ideal candidates. The survey provided in Appendix A and the interview questions in Appendix B were developed to offer United States service members the opportunity to discuss their experiences in Afghanistan as members of a foreign military in Afghan society.

I offered the survey online through the site Survey Monkey. This was an effective tool and made sharing it incredibly convenient. The first portion of the survey was created in order to gain background knowledge of the troops being surveyed. Demographic information could then be used to identify patterns between different groups within the survey information (i.e. gender, location within Afghanistan, branch of military). General information about the types and frequency of activities between troops and Afghans would also lay the groundwork for this study by providing a glimpse into troop activities not typically covered by outside sources.

The section, "Base Host Relationships & Civilian Support" was designed to allow the troops to describe their viewpoints on a variety of topics regarding U.S. discourses on Afghanistan. These viewpoints can then be compared to U.S. policy and preconceived notions about Afghan civilians and society. Questions

about positive and negative actions are presented in order to gain an understanding of problems that arise within the U.S. troop/Afghan relationships. This will begin to paint a picture of what issues can arise from a foreign military presence within a community. Soldiers' opinions on trust are questioned to gain knowledge of where they feel allegiances lie. These answers can be used to show how a foreign military's presence can alter societal relations, goals and roles within daily lives of a particular community.

The next section of the survey offers questions about the troop's education and training before and while they were in Afghanistan. These questions were proposed to gauge what knowledge troops had in terms of Afghan society and culture. This would provide a basis when analyzing their actions with different portions of the Afghan society. It would also provide insight into difficulties the U.S. troops might have in their interactions with civilians on a daily basis. This information would be crucial in identifying how two different cultures interact with each other, especially within the stressful circumstances provided within a military setting.

A section of questions were provided for the troops to give insight to their roles within the Afghan conflict. Rhetoric of liberation was used to mimic the U.S. discourse of Operation Enduring Freedom (Brown, 2012). Questions were used to determine if troops identified with this description or if they felt other terminology towards their actions and roles were more appropriate. Troops were also asked to describe their views and interactions with Afghan men, women and youth. These questions were designed for the troops to counter their descriptions

of their own roles with viewpoints of those they would be forced to interact with. These questions were strategically placed in this section to illicit a response about Afghan society while troops were contemplating their own roles within this foreign society.

The section of the survey entitled “U.S. Forces Purpose and Responsibility” was designed to get the troops to contemplate what purpose their deployment to Afghanistan served. It was hoped that troops would go behind standard talking points found within typical U.S. government and media talking points, as well as question if their presence was even needed. Questions regarding what effects their presence had on Afghanistan were open ended as to not direct their responses in any particular direction. Answers to many of these questions would elicit a wide variety of responses, having many of them question the overall motives behind their presence in the country.

3.2 Interviews

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to provide contact information if they wished to be contacted for personal interviews. The idea behind the interviews were to provide troops the opportunity to add to their responses or provide new information they felt was important that may not have been covered by the survey. I conducted personal interviews with available surveyed participants in the spring of 2011. Interviews conducted after this season were acquired via phone and the Internet. Questions were formed on a case-by-case basis for each person surveyed. If interesting points were made

within their survey or if there were any items that needed more clarification, they would be focused on first. I would then give the interviewee the opportunity to expand on any subject of their interest. Interviews were conducted in person, over the phone and through emails.

There were a few participants who could not be met in person due to scheduling conflicts or geographical distance. These participants would be provided an email interview that mirrored the interviews with other respondents, asking for clarification or expansion on survey topics and allowing for the respondent to speak to any issue that was not directly asked to them. The email interviews were quite effective, given the length of participants' responses. They reflected a great range of attitudes and experiences. To try and expand on the perceptions of the participants about the nuances of this relationship, I ended my interviews with a creative exercise. The emails were closed with the following questions being posed:

If you were to be the host of one Afghan person for tea, who would it be? Use your imagination. I want you to describe to me the who, what, why, when, where, and how of this encounter. Imagine you are unrestricted by language. No translator needed. How would you dress? How would they? Describe this person for me. You could have met this person or they could be based on your knowledge or perception of Afghans. It could be an average citizen or public figure, whoever you personally, if given the chance, would want to talk to. They could be in any group whether devout to opposition, corruption, civil or civilian life? Man or woman, you have the opportunity to communicate freely with this person. What American and Afghan cultural norms would you include? What would you talk about? What would you say about your time in Afghanistan and interpretation of their culture? Would weapons be present? How would you sit? Describe the scenario and your related emotions.

This exercise was designed to both add to the data collected in the interviews and surveys, as well as provide insight into areas I had not previously imagined. While only a few responded, it concludes the data collection with a

creative reflection on the relationship between foreign militaries and local communities.

3.3 Participation and Resistance

My goal was to survey and interview both veterans and active military members about their experiences with Afghan civilians since 2001. Each of the participants spoke of their specific time in Afghanistan, within different parts of the country, different times in their personal lives and different times in the discourses. This wide range of views told of experiences across many aspects of Afghan life and military service. Some troops had years to process their time in Afghanistan and form their opinions. Others had only been back from active duty for a few months, emotions still fresh in their minds. This range of self-reflection provided a well-rounded set of responses and emotions that could be used throughout this thesis.

I designed the online survey and shared it with liaisons of various organizations that serve and connect the military and veteran communities. These liaisons would review the survey individually or with their staff and then make a decision whether they wanted to share it with their members who have served in the U.S. military in Afghanistan. If they decided they would like to participate, I then sent them a link to be sent to their members via whatever process they thought would be best. I also took the opportunity to meet in person with liaisons directly when I was in their city in order to discuss my goals, project

and the subject matter. Due to the sensitivity of the research subject matter, it was especially important to meet with people in person when possible. The opportunity to meet face to face helped with people's caution about participating and also helped develop a rapport.

I proposed the project to multiple groups with the potential of reaching thousands of soldiers and veterans. After leaving the survey open to responses from the fall of 2010 to the spring of 2012, approximately fifty participants in all participated in the survey; about a quarter decided to participate in interviews. The reaction was incredibly varied and as I proceeded to communicate further with the participants and liaisons they shared their thoughts on the project. There were those that who were immediately comfortable with the project and promptly shared it with their members. Some of these liaisons and participants shared that they felt it was an important subject and one that needed further investigation. They acknowledged that relationships between U.S. soldiers and Afghan civilians were incredible complex and further comprehension was needed to be beneficial for both parties involved. Many commented that media and academia often overlooked it and it was an essential component of the conflict. Many participants stated a general distrust of media and their slanted portrayals of soldiers' identities and roles in wartime.

However, other groups were offended at the project's concept and subject. Responses ranged from claims that the questions in the survey jeopardized American national security or that they felt like an interrogation. Some claimed it was too soon for soldiers to be talking about the subject and their experiences.

Some felt it would be difficult for soldiers to recount their experiences with the high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder amongst those who served in the military. The aforementioned groups explained these reservations and declined to participate once they reviewed the survey. A liaison of another group told me that he didn't want me turning his members into lab rats to further my own agenda or career. While on one end of the spectrum there was vocalized resistance to the project's theme, other groups seemed neutral or indifferent, ignoring multiple inquiries into working with them. Other groups seemed incredibly disorganized and unprofessional making it a challenge to continue the process.

One participant told me, post-interview, that the survey was the most comprehensive and balanced survey he had seen offered to military members. He explained that in his lengthy career as a soldier he had seen many surveys shared. He said nearly all of them contained leading and biased questions that allowed participants to only portray the positive aspects of the military and conflicts as well as questions that didn't take much thought or reflection. He imagined I would have a difficult time having people participate since this sort of balanced approach to researching them was foreign. The other challenge, as one liaison explained is that soldiers and veterans feel bombarded with surveys and often want to be left alone to live their lives and attempt to readjust to life back in the United States. These factors and refusals ended up describing the subject in a different way and added to its dimension not through survey statistics but through a better understanding of the attitudes and conflicts related to

understanding the war and the mentality of troops when they return and their comfort in sharing these experiences.

University groups supporting the active military community and veterans on campus were the most responsive such as Brigham Young University in Utah, New Mexico State-Las Cruces and the University of Colorado, where I was able to conduct interviews. The largest commitment was made through the support and interest from the Tillman Foundation, a national group based in Arizona. This particular group made suggestions for what would make the foundation members and all troops feel more comfortable during the survey and interview. They also wanted to clarify if I had any political agendas or premeditated slants toward the subject. This foundation's development and namesake is an important narrative about the war in Afghanistan. Pat Tillman was a professional football player in the United States who enlisted after 9/11, leaving his athletic career. After he was deployed to Iraq and witnessed the intervention, he was critical of his country's methods and purpose in GWOT. However, he remained in the military to fulfill his commitment and was then deployed to Afghanistan. A fellow soldier, who was shooting his weapon recklessly when there was no threat at the time, killed him in 2004. However, his death by "friendly fire" was masked with a narrative of a heroic Tillman dying at the hands of the enemy while defending his fellow troops. His family was skeptical of how the story was spun after details of his death emerged during their personal inquiry. This revealed a cover up that later publicly embarrassed the U.S. administration. His widow developed the

foundation in his honor, providing active military and veterans with educational support through the Tillman Military Scholars program (Pat Tillman Foundation).

I interviewed Echo in Las Vegas the morning after Bin Laden was killed by American military forces in Pakistan. He had been referred to me by his fellow Marine, Charlie, whom I had spoken to the month before. Echo was the most expressive and excitable. His emotions deterred me from thinking he was comfortable enough to have his voice recorded. I didn't even ask. A main theme for this participant was Islam and his perception of the natural violence of its followers. He told me that although it would require him and I in some physically compromising positions, he would teach me how to defend myself with a knife so that I could protect myself against Muslim men when I returned to Cairo. When storming Kabul during the invasion, he remembers that an Afghan man that was working with the Americans raped a younger boy also working alongside Americans in a nearby building. He could hear them and said it was the most awful sound he ever heard. When he returned to America and saw Muslims walking around, he wanted to go over and take those things off their heads and beat them up. After ten years in Las Vegas, I had never seen a Muslim man with anything on his head outside of the local mosques. I asked if he was talking about veiled women and he said no, that in fact he felt very bad how they were treated because of their men and religion. We continued with the interview and shifted towards him taking the survey. He hadn't been comfortable with taking it alone or online and preferred to take it when he met me in person. He was overjoyed and commented a number of times how amazing it was to talk to

someone about Afghanistan. He never does so. I handed him my computer and he began. After about ten minutes into the survey, in the corner of the bookstore coffee shop, the Adhan, the Muslim call to prayer, started ringing out loud from the speakers on my computer. My stomach dropping was instantaneous with his freak out. He started repeating, "what is that!" He was shaking, his face showing a range of emotions- then took his hands off the keyboard as though he had somehow brought the muezzin to life with his typing. I quickly muted it, and calmed him down apologizing profusely and internally rebuking myself as my obvious amateur status as a researcher had shown. He started breathing better and said to me with bewilderment. "Why do you have that? I know what it is, but why?" I just paused for a second. *"Two reasons. One, I work and am friends with Muslims here in town. I like to know the prayer schedule to be respectful in terms of when I contact them. Also, it reminds me of Cairo, which I miss and love very much. It calms me."* I apologized again saying I didn't even think of turning it off as no one else uses my computer or took the survey on it before. He paused and just simply said, "That's really cool actually." He returned back to the surveyed and after we talked after for hours.

4. Liberation

Tens of thousands of U.S. troops have been based in Afghanistan over thirteen years building a vast collection of narratives and opinions about their experience in Afghan society. They are members of a foreign military whose identities exist outside the norms of their “host” society while attempting to encourage a “legitimate” Afghan government that is internationally acceptable. Their perceptions and experiences with Afghans depict a complicated description of this relationship. Imaginations and prospects surrounding this association were produced in two popular discourses based on conflicting masculinities and perceived Afghan femininity that anticipated liberation and counterinsurgency. This chapter discloses U.S. troop’s explanation of this relationship and its fluid nature that contradicts, challenges and reflects the expectations set forth by those outside of the sphere of base host relationships.

Outsiders had portrayed the conflict as a war that was built, won or lost through the relationships between U.S. troops and Afghan society. I felt it was a natural progression to explore this relationship from sources that experienced it firsthand, to better understand the sociology of war. My research site was in the United States, the soldiers’ home base, away from the Afghan arena. It was important to also understand the wider national imaginations of the American public about the U.S. intervention. However, discussing Afghans in the U.S. was not always welcome and opinions were often strong.

The U.S. liberation discourse, displayed through Operation Enduring Freedom, proclaimed that U.S. troops were deployed with the purpose of fighting

terrorists, establishing an Afghan government, and *liberating* its people from oppression and poverty. The views of the troops surveyed and interviewed reflected this sentiment. Members of the U.S. Armed Services also believed they were deployed to the country for three reasons. 32% believed they were there to fight the men responsible for the oppression of the Afghan society. 23% felt their goal was to establish a stable, functioning government. While 19% responded that it was their mission to free Afghanistan from its suffering. They saw their presence not as one of hegemonic geopolitics, but only directly related to the process of *liberating* the country and its people. This chapter will look at soldier's viewpoints of these three motives and the gender implications their views have on their mission and Afghan society. From the responses of a survey to one-on-one interviews, patterns and consensus emerged as U.S. troops expressed their thoughts and attitudes. Troops' viewpoints fall in line and contradict both government and public discourse on Afghanistan, the reasons behind the U.S. intervention and the *good guy liberator/bad guy oppressor* dichotomy.

Propaganda regarding the liberation of Afghanistan fits into a discourse of the interventionist in a protective role as contrary to the villainous and oppressive masculinity that was symbolized through the Taliban. "The logic of masculinist protection appears in the claimed relationship of the United States to people outside the West, particularly in Islamic countries, ruled by brutal dictatorships...The women of Afghanistan constituted the ultimate victims, putting the United States in the position of ultimate protector" (Young, 2003, p. 17). Propaganda that placed a heroic and protective protector between the Afghan

villains and victims produced roles that seemed stagnant and based on the premonition that these identities were based on absolute truths or benevolent cross cultural respect of understanding the players and “others” involved. Through representing Afghanistan as a female victim, these supposed truths reduced the country to a characterization of someone needing to be saved or liberated. “U.S. military hegemony but also international trade and financial institutions, as well as many Western-based nongovernmental development agencies, position them in this way as feminized or infantilized women and children under the protection and guidance of the wise and active father” (Young, 2003, p. 19). Troops responses to these concepts represented how important rescuing Afghanistan is to them as individuals and demonstrates how these truths and assumptions are not absolute. The responses also show a different interpretation from person to person and each of the respondents were impacted heavily by the opinions they acquired through these relationships.

4.1. Being the Hero

U.S. troops were strongly convinced Afghanistan needed to be *liberated* (82%). This viewpoint was strongly ingrained in U.S. doctrine and media propaganda. It also became clear through the survey responses and interviews that these views held strong for the U.S. troops as well. While most respondents were neutral on the notion of it being their responsibility to bring justice to Afghanistan, many felt the need to heed the call of their country. An overwhelming sense of pride in their reasons for being in Afghanistan can be

read through the viewpoints expressed. “To bring stability and civility into the country, in particular the ruling government,” is an example of a common mindset as to why these troops feel that they are in Afghanistan. Bravo was asked at one point before he joined the military, “Do you want to be out here in the great war doing something, or do you want to be lazy?” Bravo then proceeded to explain how excited he was when he first got to Afghanistan, that he wanted to change the world and make a difference. However, by the end of his deployment he became disillusioned and all he could think about was getting back home. These generalized notions of doing “the right thing” and being the “hero” are based on good intentions albeit a simplistic view of the overall situation on the ground. These ideals created a masculine gender role that identified the foreign military force as the *liberator*, being the backbone for the U.S. troops’ motivation in their quests. Many respondents also referred to themselves as the “good guys” as opposed to what they called the opposition, the “bad guys.”

I think we are the good guys. We try to follow the rules; we try to do good things. The heart of the American people is in a good place. We’ve been there 10 years... I like to think that my participation was as the good guy [who tries] to help out a nation. (Bravo)

The *liberation/oppression* dichotomy placed the opposition in the role of the oppressors. This generalized group is again seen by U.S. discourse and public sentiment as well as media propaganda in the same light as the U.S. troops being deployed. The opposition is made up of the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and various fighting groups both foreign and local to Afghanistan. These groups were seen as pushing their extreme views on the local Afghan society or subjecting the population to harsh treatment. Mistreatment of women, unjust punishments, and

“extreme social standards” were common rallying points against this opposition. “The Taliban was a harsh time for Afghans, and they needed foreign support to oust them,” says one survey respondent. This sentiment created an opposing masculinity in the eyes of U.S. service members. Delta described these role descriptions:

I agree that it is not good to group everyone into good guy, bad guy groups. I don't care what nationality he is, if he is firing a weapon at me than he is a bad guy, that's just the way it is...You just become desensitized to the situation. You don't want to think about your enemy. (Delta)

The discourse had oversaturated the connection between Islamic extremism and Afghan victimhood. Uniform wrote, “They [Taliban] got the Koran wrong from the little bit of knowledge they know.” Uniform felt this was based on ignorance, further perpetuating the narrative of their little knowledge. Many troops believed the Taliban had misinterpreted their religion and used it in an extreme fashion to oppress their society and justify “misogyny.” The opposition, through their negative actions, became a masculine *oppressor* and simultaneously an adversary. The opposition would become the target of the troops’ mission in *liberating* Afghanistan and were seen as the conflicting masculinity.

The conflict between these two roles, *liberator* and *oppressor*, were originally thought of as clear-cut in the eyes of the U.S. troops. The opposition had set themselves apart from the local Afghan population by their actions. This created an assumption that most Afghans felt the same way as the U.S. troops coming to rescue them. One might think it would be a simple deduction that if a society was being mistreated, they would welcome anyone that could help them overcome this problem. In some cases respondents did meet these reactions,

“Afghans I met adamantly opposed the Taliban philosophy.” The U.S. government had built much of their reasoning behind this notion of the United States coming to save Afghans. At the same time, the troops reflected this notion in their original reasons for the United States getting involved in the conflict. Contact with opposition insurgents happened on weekly basis for most of the respondents. The type of contact differs with this group compared to the other groups being discussed in this chapter. While there was contact by way of combat, there was no dialogue between opposition insurgents and U.S. troops. Nearly all perceptions would then be formed on exposure not only with direct fighting, but also indirectly by way of seeing firsthand the effects of these groups on the local civilians, a group in which communication was more common.

As U.S. troops began to gain experience and have interactions with local Afghans and opposition groups, they began to realize that their original assumptions might not be as black and white as the media or even their own government had portrayed them. The U.S. troops found themselves in an uphill battle just to convince the local population that they were in fact the *liberators*, there to help the Afghans. Multiple factors led to this identity crisis and gender role confusion. Troops quickly learned that it was not easy to discern between the local population and the opposition groups. The Taliban were made up of the local populations and not only blended well physically and in societal roles but also their viewpoints were founded on their surroundings and country’s history. Since the same surroundings and history also shaped the viewpoints of the portion of society that did not identify with the Taliban, it should not be a surprise

that these “two” groups did not share at least some similar views. “The Taliban mix well with the local population because they are the local population,” quipped one respondent. As the soldiers lived on bases outside communities, the opposition mixed with local Afghans, lived with them, and was a part of their social sphere. The soldiers on the other hand, lived in bases outside of communities, closed off to the people they were trying to *liberate*. This disconnect would prove to be a huge hurdle for service members as their quest to be the *liberators* they were promised continued. Another aspect that hampered the troops’ mission was collateral damage to both physical life and to the societal fabric of the Afghan population. “If our bombs landed too close to their villages, they would work with the Taliban and give them information on our base,” cited Mike. It would be a noted concern of troops that their role to fight the Taliban and other opposition forces might have unwanted consequences with this oppressed group they were trying to save. Every aspect of the troop’s presence was scrutinized. U.S. troops were the outsiders in this country and sentiments towards them were not as positive as troops were led to believe. While troops believed that they were promoting good ideals and having a positive effect on Afghan society, they also realized that the way things were being done might not have always been the best for the Afghan society.

There are a lot of things that we changed: the voting, the rights of the women and young girls. All those things changed for the better. So there are some good things that happened. But then there are some bad things that happened because we were trying to force a lot of our beliefs instead of allowing them to be embraced by Afghans. I don't if Afghans would set up their society in the same we would. (Delta)

As the confidence faded after the initial invasion in 2001 and 2002, it became clear to U.S. troops that their original perceptions and role formations were not materializing. While in their minds they still held on to the beliefs and values that they were on the side of “good,” there to help a people in need, they realized that they were not always perceived that way. The Afghan population that they came to liberate was wary of foreigners in their land, fighting around their villages and killing members of their communities. A backlash began to form around the presence of U.S. troops. One service member mentioned that, “Often [the Afghan population] saw the Taliban as a heroic force that was fighting the foreign occupiers.” Many in the communities would then proclaim, “Yes, we are all Taliban,” showing that this was something the average citizen could now be proud of. “If IED went off in a village,” the U.S. was blamed for the violent act. The opposition groups wouldn’t have to commit these acts if the troops were not there. This mindset would eventually lead to a battle over the *liberator* gender role. Both the U.S. troops and their opposition counterparts would seek to lay claim to this title in the name of defending the Afghan population. All experiences collected showed that the soldiers’ believed in their mission, meant well and were not part of an imperial military.

Throughout the day, as we broke out the bricked up windows, repainted those walls, and re-developed the building into a workable school, the local population slowly came out to see what we were doing. It wasn’t until the children of the village showed up, late in the afternoon, and began exploring their new school that, in my mind, they understood the oppression was over and they were, with the US’s help, free to live and thrive as they saw fit. (Whiskey)

4.2. Helping Afghans Help Themselves

The next main goal of the US intervention in Afghanistan was to create a national Afghan government. This government would also be supported through the formation of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) forces. There were two driving factors behind this U.S. idea. The first notion of the U.S. policy makers was to create a “non-oppressive” Afghan leadership that would replace the Taliban and its harsh treatment of the local population. The second was to allow the victimized section of society that had been mistreated and marginalized to have a voice in their future, country, and societal laws. Within the interviews and surveys, troops were questioned both about their initial feelings towards the formation of these groups, as well as how these groups affected the society they were governing.

There was a common theme both among the U.S. government discourse, as well as throughout the soldiers surveyed, that there was a strong need for the Afghans to form a national government. As U.S. troops based their assumptions on their own personal experiences, they felt a stable centralized government could be formed and would govern effectively. The idea was to empower the *oppressed* masses. In the eyes of the troops, this empowerment would go hand in hand with the liberation discourse by giving the Afghan civilians the tools needed to take care of themselves and their country after they were no longer under Taliban control. Since one of the first priorities of OEF was to remove the oppressive Taliban, the de facto government at the time of the invasion, it was

apparent the next step would be to fill that void. It was also implied by the troops that these government forces would be supported by the Afghan population. As with the removal of the opposition forces, these assumptions would prove challenging as roles within the society did not always fit into the United States troops' preconceived ideas.

After the creation of the government and ANA and ANP forces, troops found themselves in direct contact with these groups, often working alongside them. Weekly and daily contact was prevalent throughout the survey group in regards to ANA and ANP forces. These interactions were primarily through joint operations or within a training capacity. "Working joint border control operations at the busiest border crossing from Pakistan (Torkham Gate)," commented one respondent. Other interactions with ANA and ANP forces occurred on base both in passing, and during off duty hours such as dining. "I enjoyed meeting them and hearing about their lives," one of the U.S. soldiers responded in the survey. These initial feelings fell in line with the troops' original lines of thinking. Afghans were rising through the ranks of their societal hierarchies. They were no longer just an *oppressed* group under the rule of a heavy-handed regime. The U.S. troops had provided opportunities for Afghans and now they could better their country as a whole.

Similar to the preconceived notions about fighting the oppressors, there would be unforeseen flaws in the U.S. ideals to create a better Afghanistan. With only limited knowledge of Afghan societal structure, troops were unprepared for the difficulties in pressuring Afghans to adopt a central form of government. With

a history and focus on a tribal culture, Afghans were apprehensive about adopting a new mindset when it came to groups governing their lives:

It goes back to the fundamental focus on self preservation and the inability to know or care (or know to care) about the government. In fact, as my platoon and I were setting the conditions for the 1st-ever democratic elections in the history of the country, we discovered that just about nobody even knew what a Provincial government was, let alone what purpose it served or why it was important. Teaching them what voting was, and how to do it was another massive struggle against conceptual inertia. (Tango)

Not only does Tango show the struggles soldiers have within this excerpt from his interview, but it also shows the connection between *liberation* and democracy. Soldiers thought that Afghans could not be fully *liberated* without having a democratic government to support their new freedoms.

When questioned whether “Afghan communities trust and support Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police?” 59% of the respondents felt the Afghan communities did not trust and support the ANA and ANP. Only 12.5% thought the communities did trust and support these groups, while the remainder of the respondents remained neutral on the issue. 75% of respondents felt there was no trust of the current government by civilians. Questions must be raised when comparing these statistics with that of trust between communities and local tribal leadership. 87.5% of respondents felt that communities did trust this more local and historically Afghan form of government. These numbers express disconnect between the two cultures and how they feel their societies can be effectively governed. While this statistic points out only one discrepancy between U.S. discourse and Afghan society, this idea of misunderstanding and lack of knowledge of the other repeats itself throughout interactions between U.S. troops and Afghans. “Understanding the ties between local populations and their tribal

leaders and in depth political analysis of how these relationships work can only help line leaders in the field who have to deal with these individuals on a daily or weekly basis,” noted one interviewee.

While some of the problems lie within the basic differences and histories between the U.S. and Afghan cultures, other factors led to the distrust and lack of support for the Afghan government and its supporting forces. Soldiers noted rampant corruption within the ranks of the newly formed Afghan groups. This placed the Afghan population in a similar situation to that of their previous rulers, the Taliban. It showed the Afghan civilians that the Afghan government, troops and police forces might not be people you could trust, or would have your best interests in mind. Like the Taliban, they may be only trying to exploit their power for whatever they feel is best for them and not for the country as a whole. While the new form of government may not be *oppressing* the society with extreme laws or obtuse women’s rights, they were still becoming a feminized population. The masculine *oppressors* had simply changed from Afghans under the label of the Taliban, to Afghans under the label of government officials, ANA or ANP. Again while the intentions of the U.S. troops were well placed, their shortfalls were not lost on them. When asked what Afghan civilians need to be protected from, many responses included the Afghan government alongside opposition forces such as the Taliban. “Corrupt police, corrupt government, and the Taliban,” answered one service member. “The Taliban and their own government,” responded another. These shortcomings within the government and forces set up by the U.S. discourse only added to the uphill battle in their

fight to *liberate* the Afghan people. Similarly to the problems encountered from fighting with opposition forces, U.S. actions were progressively being seen negatively in the eyes of the Afghan population. This would continue to work against their ideal situation of the troops *liberating* the Afghan people and instead add to the notion that the U.S. troops were in fact the ones *oppressing* the Afghan society. They had developed a new “official” Afghan masculinity and were concerned when it didn’t match the *liberating* image they had made in their own likeness.

4.3. The Liberated Population

While women became an easy rallying point for America’s westernized culture, the troops surveyed had many opinions about all aspects of the group they were going to liberate. The Afghan civilians were initially viewed as a feminized society under the oppression of the Taliban and other extremist groups within the country. They lacked basic rights, freedoms and opportunities. The soldiers’ views would mirror that of the U.S. media and cultural perspectives; Afghans needed to be saved.

82% of US troops surveyed either agree or strongly agree that Afghanistan should be liberated while most respondents were neutral on whether the Afghan people actually want to be liberated. This contradiction is a strong indicator as to the U.S. perspective on the Afghan situation. It shows that they feel they know what is best for the Afghan people, even if they do not. That is a

bold statement to make about a society that one is unfamiliar with, one that will continually haunt the troops efforts.

The amount of interaction between groups within Afghan society varied greatly. One group in particular, Afghan women, had the least amount of contact with U.S. troops yet elicited some of the strongest responses. Most reported that they did not have contact with Afghan women, although many did respond to the question; “briefly describe Afghan women’s (personality, attitude, manners, etc).” Most responded with descriptions such as shy, submissive, reserved and subservient. However, based on their individual experiences, views towards women contradicted each other as well as U.S. social discourse and propaganda. One respondent commented that, “In the part of the country I was in, women were hardly second class citizens. They weren’t any kind of citizen at all. They were more like livestock.” Another went on to describe that:

They served as a measure of a man’s status, were completely stripped of their own sense of identity and self-worth, and could be severely punished (up to and including banishment or death) for the slightest infraction of the Taliban’s gender “norms.” It is utterly tragic to see the wholesale annihilation of the human spirit.
(Tango)

Comments like this reinforced the ideas of Afghan women as victims in the liberation propaganda and challenged the respect of norms discussed within counterinsurgency. However, it also fit in with the stereotypes regarding the women challenged by critics of this propaganda.

An interviewee went on to describe women:

My sense is that women are not hidden, generally, or segregated, at least not in the public space. I cannot speak to much extent on the traditional arrangements in the privacy of an Afghan home; however, women are everywhere in Afghanistan, in public: they are selling goods at markets; they are working in offices; they are in the Afghan military and police (now); they are teachers and leaders in their parliament. Even traditionally, my understanding is that women

are not ostracized as they are in some more radically fundamentalist Muslim countries, or as they were during the Taliban rule, which was atypical of Afghan culture. (Victor)

This participant contradicts the generalized victim description in their experience and explains it as a “western construct”:

It is hard for me to conclude that, with some exceptions, an Afghan woman functioning in the ways I described, or, as perhaps the majority do, tending to the home in more traditional ways – farming, cooking, and the like – are second class citizens: I think that is something of a western construct, akin to imagining that women in the US who choose to be housewives, home school children, pursue or not pursue college or graduate level education, are second class citizens. (Victor)

The media played a major role in forming the opinions of troops before they experienced Afghanistan for themselves. While many described their reasoning for joining the fight in Afghanistan on reasoning sold to them by media and politics, some became exposed to the sometimes one-sidedness of the profession.

You're seeing many journalists but I didn't meet a single one that didn't have an agenda or didn't have a preconceived notion and opinion. Regardless of what you said, this is how they would say it. (Alpha)

Delta added to questioning the motives of the media and its effect on the U.S. thought process when rationalizing their actions.

Our culture in a sense, when it comes to war, is limited in this way. What comes to us going into another country and taking the life, it's not that hard because they're the enemy. Did they forget that there's a human side to that and they have families, a wife and kids, that they were breathing a one-time? They (US society) don't look at it that way. (Delta)

As for the actual interaction or lack thereof between Afghan women, and U.S. troops, one respondent noted that it minimized the effectiveness foreign armed forces would have in their goals. By not being able to speak with and hear from women, the troops could not get a full picture of all the problems they felt needed to be corrected. This, in turn, would lead troops to rely on what they have heard

from media, their own government and speculation to form their opinions about problems facing Afghan women. They also revealed that perhaps the segregation of women, while seen as extreme, has been possibly perceived as a defense mechanism from the number of foreign militaries that have been based in Afghanistan. While women are often seen as victims, there is also a strong sense of protection over their bodies. The respondent went on to say, "U.S. will have even less effects because they do not produce offspring with the local female population." He said to his knowledge, he did not know of any service members having carnal relationships with local women". He admitted, "I am sure it has happened but I have never heard of it personally." I then asked if this is difficult for soldiers, hoping he would dig deeper into the issue. He said, "No, they didn't have a difficult time not being with Afghan women." The respondent believed that there was evidence of a Russian genetic legacy based on ethnic appearance and that they, "can't even imagine the political fallout/disaster of getting an Afghan woman pregnant." He wouldn't, "necessarily want to pursue an Afghan woman, as they are all covered up, dirty and poor. It's clear the Russians left something behind besides weapons and airfields." The respondent believes that the U.S. military has been very respectful of cultural norms regarding women in Afghanistan.

All respondents reported interaction with Afghan men either daily or weekly. The descriptions of Afghan men varied greatly from respondent to respondent. Responses varied more when asked about men rather than women because the responses were based on actual experience rather than

perceptions. In the case of Afghan women, descriptions seem to be based more on common gender rhetoric with minimal firsthand experience, while experiences with men were more specific. Although responses varied, the most common response was that Afghan men are proud and have a strong love of their country. This description can be problematic for U.S. troops when identifying them as a feminized population needing *liberation*. Afghan men may view this role identification negatively and take actions to defend their masculinity, often siding with the opposition.

Afghan society was most often described as family oriented. This idea also works in favor of the views previously expressed in this chapter citing reasons U.S. troops have difficulty separating opposition fighters from foreign civilians. With strong community and family bonds, opposition fighters can easily slip in and out of the opposition role as well as spread influence to other Afghan civilians. This fluidity between roles benefits the opposition forces greatly over that of their U.S. counterparts.

Troops did report some positive reactions to their presence. The most commonly believed positive effects of U.S. troops in Afghanistan were access to jobs and education. Some troops also reported women having more freedoms as well due to their presence, "Women have greater freedoms, children can attend schools, and civic utilities can function properly". Access to aid and humanitarian services was also brought up multiple times. When looking at the positive effects, these items must be viewed in consideration to the overall conflict within Afghanistan and its history. Access to jobs and education are important societal

needs and encourage growth across all genders. However, these needs tend to be overshadowed by more pressing issues such as safety, governing bodies and foreign invaders. It can be deduced that until Afghanistan is more stabilized, growth in more progressive ideals such as women's rights will be put on hold.

As part of the survey, troops were asked a series of questions about their level of education about Afghanistan. 94% of respondents "strongly agreed" that U.S. forces receive education and training about their host community, society, and culture. Answers were mixed when asked whether they received enough training before and during their tour in Afghanistan. 57% of troops felt that more training in cultural and social customs would be the most beneficial when interacting with Afghans.

These ideas point out that the notion of preconceived ideas or lack of knowledge about a people or their customs and culture could be detrimental when trying to liberate them. Further study and training by military forces may have concluded different gender roles and identified better societal needs from a *liberator* or *if a liberator* is needed at all.

It would have been easy to look at these people, both combatants and civilians, as being less than what we are and inferior. These people are survivors and absolutely capable of taking care of themselves and solving problems, even though their methods may be different than ours. (Victor)

5. Hearts and Minds Discourse

As the U.S. war in Afghanistan progressed, roles changed with the changing situation on the ground. This led to both a change in the discourse by outside actors such as the U.S. government and media as well as with the U.S. troops' personal views. The initial roles of the U.S. troops being *liberators*, fighting the *oppressive* terrorist groups and *saving* the Afghan civilians, had been blurred leaving the U.S. to reevaluate their place in Afghanistan. While the main goals of fighting terrorism, establishing a national government and providing Afghan civilians with a better life remained, the ways in which the troops would need to go about achieving these goals had to change dramatically. With Afghan civilians not embracing the U.S. troops in their country or the government and security forces they were trying to put in place, U.S. policy would need to change its policies towards Afghan civilians. Rather than being seen as a passive group under the influence of the Taliban or U.S. troops, they would play a more active role. Afghan civilians would need to be convinced of the U.S. troop's goals and be utilized by the U.S. troops. This shift in strategy still produces the same results of fighting terrorism and liberating the Afghan people, just through different means. This chapter will look at the causes for the need to change strategies and the new gender roles that would be created in the process.

Through the interview process and survey responses, troops described what they experienced on the ground. Within these descriptions, six themes became apparent in the process to change from a liberation discourse to the counterinsurgency strategy of "The Campaign to Win the Hearts and Minds" of

Afghan civilians; education/training, role confusion, money/loyalty, trust and respect, cultural compatibility, and danger to the troops. These themes will be discussed and analyzed from the viewpoints of the U.S. troops serving in Afghanistan.

The U.S. military was attempting to counter these built up representations and behavior of troops through counterinsurgency doctrine. Symbolizing the Afghans through a female victim had proved to be problematic and didn't match the range of identities and communities they had within these relationships. Even the choice to focus on the burka and veil in Afghanistan as a sign of progress further made this conflict about something inanimate and not human.

We need to recognize that, whatever effect it has had on the women who wear it, the veil has also had a radical impact on our own field of vision, on our capacity to recognize Muslim societies for something other than misogyny and patriarchal violence. Our ability to respond, morally and politically, in a responsible way to these forms of violence will depend on extending these powers of sight (Hirschkind and Mahmood, 2012, p. 353).

Counterinsurgency extended these "powers of sight" and claimed through practicing "lessons learned," troops could move the Afghans away from the oppressive elements of their society. Troops are conflicted by these constructs offered in the two discourses. They are told if they exhibit these qualities when interacting with Afghans they have the power to change the course of the war. However, they place responsibility not just on insurgents and explain that they witness Afghans' civilians and members of the state apparatus who can be apathetic to their vision or work against it even when cultural considerations are made. This problematizes cultural considerations and a hearts and minds policy that can make the Afghan population support a foreign mission like Operation

Enduring Freedom and its practices. Troops develop and make their own constructs of Afghans based on their interactions with them just as Afghans do the same. Gender roles and social constructs produced are not from biological differences in foreign troops and Afghans. "Instead we see gender identities as effects of power-laden social practices, through which cultural scripts are produced and bodies and selves endowed with social meaning" (Coleman, and Bassi, 2011). Both of these focal points produce opinions and interactions that affect the relationship roles developed in this intervention. However, the outcome of these exchanges are heavily influenced outside of the personal contacts had, by a myriad of considerations such as poverty and tribal affiliations and wider base host relationships. Even when cultural components are explained, it needs to be put into the perspective and experience of what it is to be a member of a foreign military. "Occasionally, Afghan women wear the burqa because it provides protection from dust to keep the clothing clean... The burqa also gives them privacy, allowing them to hide their identity. Unfortunately, it may also be worn by males who wish to hide their gender identity, and occasionally by women, with the intent of attacking coalition forces with hidden weapons or explosives" (Murphy, 2010, p. 78). If a U.S. Culture Newsletter was produced by Afghans explaining foreign troops to Afghans, no doubt it would be richer than the constructs offered in the propaganda, whether in support or defiance of their presence. It would also as this excerpt mentioned have to define the foreign troops through how their cultural or institutional norms could be used to harm Afghans. Afghans constructs of this intervention and relationship need to be

understood through their lives not just their culture before the U.S. can learn how they are a problem within this supposed solution for the country. Focusing on culture in hearts and minds ignores the combination of culture met by foreign presence that troubles this relationship and produces negative outcomes, not the Afghan culture itself.

5.1 Education and Training

U.S. troops realized a necessity for education and training about the culture and customs of Afghanistan in order to carry out the strategy so that they not only understand what they are implementing but also how they are going to proceed within the foreign culture they are placed. The idea of education and training was brought up in the surveys and interviews to see if they felt they had the proper knowledge and skill sets to carry out the discourse they were being asked. In the early stages of the conflict, U.S. troops' skills were primarily based on fighting terrorism and combat situations. As the war progressed and the strategy changed to the *hearts and minds* campaign, the troops were asked to take a new approach. With this new approach came new roles for most of the servicemen and women. This transition asked them to step outside of their combat roles and interact on more personal levels with Afghans. This led me to ask them questions to see if they felt they had enough education and training for this new role.

88% of troops believe that the campaign to win hearts and minds is important. Only 50% believed the Hearts and Minds Campaign worked well while

they were personally deployed in the country. When asked what they thought could help improve the effectiveness of the hearts and minds campaign, 78% felt that more non-military efforts would be effective. This shows the troops realization that although they were a fighting force, they would need to step outside of their primary roles.

Troops typically get trained to fight, and it was apparent through the surveys and interviews that these troops were in Afghanistan under the primary purpose to fight terrorism. As the original *liberator* role was not as effective as those in command of the U.S. forces would have liked, the strategies were adapted. The Hearts and Minds Campaign would take the civilians out of their *oppressed* role that previous discourses had placed them in and instead utilize their help in liberating their own country. This change in discourse placed the success of the missions on both parties working together. For these groups to work effectively common knowledge of each other's roles in the conflict, cultural norms, and way to communicate would be necessary.

97% of troops felt that it is important for U.S. forces to receive education and training about their host community, society and culture. Responses were mixed on whether or not they felt they received enough education and training before and during their tours in Afghanistan. The most common area of education desired by troops was to have more knowledge of the social and cultural customs they would have to interact with. Many troops reported that not understanding the culture reflected poorly on the troops and made their job to win the *hearts and minds* of the Afghans much harder.

Sierra described situations where lack of language skills led to interesting interactions with Afghans. "Since there is usually little verbal communication due to the fact that we don't speak the same language, there is a charades dance and that always accompanies these situations." This becomes a disadvantage when trying to express the goals and reasoning for U.S. troops being in Afghanistan to Afghans, but also day-to-day activities such as buying good from a local bazaar:

We didn't really get information on how to interact with them [Afghans]. There are social faux pas made that would be viewed as offensive because we didn't know any better (greeting with the wrong hand, etc). We weren't taught even how to say hello or anything. Most of the troops are small town and not even familiar with the concept as to how foreign interactions can be construed as rude or offensive even if you mean well. (Sierra)

It was also noted that while many positive things were being accomplished for the civilian population, the good intentions were getting lost in translation as the result of mediocre relations.

When troops were asked what the best action they could take to better the relationships with Afghan civilians, the most common response concluded that troops must "learn more about their culture and try to educate them [Afghan civilians] as to what we are doing in their country." Some responses focused less on how Afghan civilians felt and more on how troops could accomplish their goals, noting that it was "Important for soldiers to learn about culture in order to accomplish soldiers' goals not necessarily out of any respect for afghans." Foxtrot explained his views on the differences education made between the ranks of U.S. troops:

Higher-ranking officers are able to relate to the situation and Afghan civilians a little bit better because they are trained to see the bigger picture. What makes being in Afghanistan and trying to fulfill your role is that your first and foremost

concern is that you want to get home safe at the end of the day. If I have to kill a civilian or two to make that happen, as the lowest ranking soldier, I can deal with that. (Foxtrot)

This experience shows that differences in rank and training played a role in an individual's actions. Comments such as these show a tough transition for troops in sharing their role as a *liberator* with the Afghan population.

Reactions to the survey and interview questions leads to the belief that troops must gain knowledge of a society in order to interact with it successfully and efficiently. Basic understandings of customs and language would help troops not only accomplish their missions but allow the host population to have a chance to understand what the troops are there to accomplish. This richer interaction might lead to less stereotyping of cultures and individuals on both sides of the conflict, allowing true evaluations of progress made to those not in the field who are determining future policies.

5.2 Role Confusion

As mentioned in the previous section, troops underwent a role change as counterinsurgency strategies were altered based on results on the ground. Troops went from a *liberating* force there to save the *oppressed* Afghan society from their terrorist *oppressors* to a group that now had to work with the Afghan civilians and treat them as equals. Not only did they need to work with the Afghan population, but they also had to convince the Afghan population that they should work with the troops. The Hearts and Minds Campaign had become a tug of war battle with the opposition over the acceptance and support of the Afghan

population. This new assignment thrust U.S. troops into a role they did not initially prepare for:

What was abundantly clear to us, though, was that our large cumbersome conventional Army was not well suited for the long-term smoldering campaigns we found ourselves in... So, while the bullets were flying and the roads were exploding, our military began transforming—in a process that still continues. It's been a complete restructuring. (Tango)

Their reactions and struggles can be seen through the conversations presented in the surveys and interviews.

The change in strategy came as a shock to most troops interviewed. They did not feel that their job in Afghanistan was to befriend the Afghan community but rather to physically fight terrorism. Foxtrot noted that he and his colleagues were in Afghanistan to fight. “The Army found itself having to build civil institutions. The troops didn’t like that, and they didn’t join the Army to do that. It isn’t what we were trained to do.” While actions such as befriending the Afghan community and building civil institutions was meant to fight terrorism by empowering the civilians to not have to rely on the Taliban anymore, U.S. troops preferred more direct methods.

The troops, however, did see the reasoning behind the change to a counterinsurgency strategy even if they were unsure if the strategy was possible. Only 55% of troops interviewed believed that it is possible to win the *hearts and minds* of the Afghan people. One would expect this number to be higher in order to have a chance of this counterinsurgency strategy working. U.S. forces were the policy makers’ eyes and ears on the ground. Their reports would be the influential factor in shaping policies. If the strategies were indeed based on the

troop's experiences, then there had to be another reason for such low confidence towards the Hearts and Minds Campaign. The responses within some of the interviews leads us to believe that this disconnect between being a fighting force and that of a humanitarian force brought on an identity crisis for many. The idea that troops trained for combat would now be trying to sell their case for being in Afghanistan to its people seems absurd. Troops were now being asked to provide aid, education and training, build schools and provide basic goods to the Afghan population:

We taught their military different tactics, techniques and procedures, helped them bring water and electricity to villages that didn't have it before, helped build schools with NGOs and brought clothing and shoes to remote villages. Hopefully to set a good example and show them that U.S. soldiers were not all evil infidels... (Delta)

U.S. troops accepted this new mission and performed it to the best of their abilities, but even with these best efforts the question has to be asked whether or not the troops were the correct group for the task. One respondent felt that only 5% of the time his training as a soldier was needed in his activities in the country and that the other 95% of the time a different set of skills and training would be needed. Troops were also split as to whether or not more or less combat with insurgents would help win the hearts and minds of Afghans. More often than not troops felt more aid to the country was the answer. An overall analysis of the data and responses reveal that most soldiers had the original *liberator* mindset from before their tours of duty or from the early stages of it. These preconceived notions or first impressions would seem nearly impossible to break free from leading to role confusion when it came time to switch to the *hearts and minds* strategy.

Constant fighting with opposition groups would lead to this role confusion as well. As stated previously, opposition groups mixed well with the local population or were even a part of the population. Troops would need to enter communities with the hopes of gaining trust and respect of the local population knowing that some of these same people could be plotting against them. This constant struggle to separate friend from foe while trying to engage the population respectfully and constructively almost seems impossible. Many recognized this dilemma and took the approach that it was the Afghans responsibility in the end to liberate their own country. Answering one survey question, a respondent explained:

Now, after a decade, we are making significant progress helping the Afghans - key phrase, "Helping the Afghans" - build the security capacity necessary to protect their people from the internal threat (Taliban resurgence)...helping the Afghans bring their own stability and security. So, we are providing now more than ever the opportunity for the AFGHAN people to succeed.

Many troops towards the end or after their deployments began to make this dissociation from their earlier roles. They noted that they were no longer the *liberators* but rather providing the tools necessary for the Afghans themselves to become the *liberators*. Ultimately most troops reflect back on their roles in Afghanistan with contradicting statements, proud of what they have accomplished, yet unsure of which accomplishments helped the Afghan society or whether it would leave a lasting impression on the population.

5.3 Money and Loyalty

When asked what the best action U.S. troops can take to better their relationships with Afghan civilians, one respondent replied, "Stop paying for

everything...always be respectful.” The *hearts and minds* strategy is based around the idea of building relationships. Relationships must be formed between the troops and the Afghan population that is stronger than that of the relationship between the opposition group and the Afghan population. The leading group with the strongest relationship will command the loyalty of the population. Many of the troops surveyed noted key behaviors of the Afghan society that made forming lasting and loyal bonds difficult for either side. These behaviors and patterns can be analyzed within the constructs of role formation and progression while relating back to the *hearts and minds* discourse.

Afghans have been in a state of constant struggle over their country with both internal and external forces for centuries. This lack of stability has turned them into persons of opportunity, taking advantage of opportunities as they arise while rarely looking at the long-term solutions. This mindset is a product of their environment and they project it onto this conflict just as they have in the past. The U.S. forces assumed that Afghan civilians would see the long-term benefits of the troops’ invasion and help in reducing the grip of the oppressive opposition. As policies shifted towards the hearts and minds doctrine, U.S. troops needed to engage Afghans and convince them to help and support the troops’ mission. One direct way to do this was through the use of money. Troops could pay for the support of the population by offering rewards for information or provide paying jobs with steady incomes. However, problems arose with this line of thinking. Troops reported that while paying for the support of the local population did have short-term benefits, it did not create a lasting bond. They told of stories

of the local population helping U.S. troops one day and opposition groups the next:

They need to stop playing both sides. They are getting paid by us to perform duties for us, and allowed privileges that end up giving them information that they then end up sharing with enemies and screwing us over...They need to not take advantage of the situations. (Sierra)

These notions expressed by Sierra represent questionable practices by the U.S. forces and policy makers. The idea that Afghans can be bought and controlled is a strong statement of a masculine force over a civilian population. The Afghans can be seen as trying to make the best of the situation they are being put in by the U.S. policies. Their actions can be seen as not as taking advantage of the U.S. troops but rather a reaction to the policies forced upon them.

When asked what the troops feel is the worst action Afghan civilians can take that would result in harming the relationship with U.S. troops, one respondent noted that Afghan civilians shouldn't "continue to play both sides of the fence and cooperate with the Taliban." This notion of loyalty did not seem to sit well with the troops. Possibly due to the sense of loyalty and pride engrained in them through their service, troops struggled with the lack of loyalty when it came to the Afghan population. Troops felt they were there to help; Afghans should realize that and do the right thing. If that didn't work they would simply hire the Afghan civilians with the idea that they would be loyal to their job. Troops would realize that Afghan loyalty, "could only be rented, not bought."

In the interviews, Foxtrot expanded on the idea of Afghan civilians supporting both sides. He explained that while the U.S. troops are in Afghanistan they can provide some benefits. Over the long term this might not be the case:

Afghans asked: Why are you [U.S. troops] here, are you going to be here tomorrow? I had a hard time with that myself, actually developing a relationship with them. They want to know are we going to be here tomorrow. If I work with you, are you going to be here when someone threatens my family? In a larger cultural sense you destroyed our government and our civil institutions, are you going to stay here and rebuild? (Foxtrot)

He went on to explain that the aid work being done has the same effect as paying Afghans for their services. All of the benefits that U.S. troops can provide Afghans are temporary. "They'd rather have the medical attention than not, but if that's the only time they see you for 6 months... They still have to live in their communities for the rest of the year." This disconnect from the troops way of thinking is an example of how roles created by people not experiencing the conflict can negatively affect those involved. A proper study of Afghan culture may have revealed some of these issues prior to implementing policies with little chance of success.

Another aspect of loyalty comes about with the physical living arrangements among the troops, opposition and civilians. The troops lived on bases built on Afghan land, while the opposition lived within Afghan communities. One interviewee brought up the notion that, "If the Taliban is supporting a village, then the villagers will likely support the Taliban." The opposition forces would have constant contact and play a bigger role in the daily lives of Afghans than that of troops whose interaction would be limited to missions entering and exiting communities. This can be analyzed to show that the group with the most contact with the civilians will have the most influence over them. Stronger relationships will be formed and their ideals will be more easily sold to the population. One respondent pointed at that the local civilians "side with the Taliban. They have a

choice of what they want; many civilians seem to pick the side that they feel is going to win the fight.” This shows that opposition groups have a great influence over the population they live with. Therefore, troops are at a disadvantage when building relationships with Afghan civilians and continue to struggle for their support and loyalty.

The last aspect of money and loyalty that can be gained from the insight of the troops’ responses is that of corruption. U.S. troops were quick to point out the waste of resources and money on many different levels. Local officials within Afghan government positions that were appointed by U.S. troops were a main source of frustration with the troops in regards to their corruption. Mismanagement of aid projects was also a topic of discussion. While troops reported trying to handle these situations as best they can, in most cases they have little recourse to these actions. These types of issues further strained the relations of U.S. troops and Afghan civilians. If the civilians could not trust the U.S. forces, how were they supposed to work together? One respondent would have liked Afghan civilians to:

Be more honest with us about sources of local corruption and what local development requirements are. But after 10 years of U.S. waste, poor project management, and engendering corruption ourselves (while contributing to the cycle of violence that they cannot escape from), I don't see this happening - they have no incentive to do any of that.

This interview shows the strain on troops to build relations with Afghan civilians and win their support and loyalty towards the U.S. cause. One of the troops noted that “hearts and minds doesn’t stop insurgency, it tries to convince the population to stop the insurgency.” While this notion of how the discourse is meant to work is not lost on troops, they realize that the position they are put in

or have created themselves, puts them at a disadvantage when in competition with opposition groups.

5.4 Trust and Respect

The success of the hearts and minds campaign is heavily influenced by the relationships formed between U.S. troops and Afghan civilians. A major component brought up by the respondents in building these relationships was trust and respect. Trust and respect relates both ways in the relationship of U.S. troops and Afghan civilians while having a direct effect on the relations with the opposition groups. Through the survey and interview questions, it was analyzed that the troops felt strongly that they should be able to trust and respect the Afghans just as much as the Afghans should trust and respect the troops.

U.S. forces originally came to Afghanistan with the hopes and assumptions that the Afghan civilians would welcome them and support them. This notion of being *liberators* helping the Afghans would garner trust and support out of the sheer act of troops fighting for the rights of the less fortunate population. After it became apparent these earlier notions would not come to fruition and the trust and support would have to be earned, the counterinsurgency strategy was changed to reflect this. The Hearts and Minds Campaign was built around the idea of gaining the support of the local population and with it the trust and respect that would follow.

Troops were asked whether or not Afghan communities trusted and supported U.S. military forces with two common themes resulting. The first theme

can be seen as a result of Afghans history with foreign invaders and occupiers. As one respondent noted, "It is difficult for the Afghans to put up with the sustained presence of foreign troops in their country." In an interview with one of the troops they reported the idea that most Afghans, "will fight whoever is seen as an occupier." Since most opposition groups were part of the Afghan society in some form they would not be labeled as *occupiers*. As for the U.S. forces, which built bases on Afghan land, conducted missions within their communities, and had foreign customs and language, it would be easy to see how they quickly became *occupiers* in the eyes of Afghans. With this label to fight against, it would be much harder for troops to win the *hearts and minds* of the local population over that of the opposition groups. One of the troops compared this idea to the notion of how the U.S. would feel if Afghans had invaded the U.S. Would Americans not be wary of the foreigners not matter how good the Afghan intentions were? Charlie asked, "... and how it would be if they came over and kicked our doors down? It would take a lot of effort and time for them to know how to work with our hearts and minds."

The second theme, and probably the most prevalent through all aspects of the research conducted, was the negative effects of harming the civilian population, life or property, though military efforts against the opposition. This notion of harming the Afghan civilians U.S. troops were trying to protect, struck a chord with the survey respondents. Delta added his thoughts in losing trust with civilians and the repercussions of this:

They could get one US soldier and kill 20 or 30 civilians, that's their mentality. That is a hard thing because whenever this happens it doesn't matter how friendly we are with a village, as soon as they get the first casualties, especially

children and women, they don't like you very much anymore. You become the enemy because of who you are and what you represent. (Delta)

When asked what the worst action troops can take that would result in harming the relationships with Afghan civilians, the most common response was, "Collateral damage of persons and property." Many troops noted how hard it was to gain the respect of the civilians when they were kicking down their doors in search of opposition forces. Alpha retold accounts of troops' smallest actions that had negative effects on building trust and respect from Afghans. "I saw guys throwing trash out of the convoys. Instead of throwing it in trashcans, they would just dump it out the ground. So their [Afghan's] perception of us must be very negative, for we are very dirty, we are very disrespectful."

It can be seen through this study that while the official discourse had changed to a *hearts and minds* strategy, *liberation* tactics were still in use. The use of force to combat insurgents while trying to provide aid to civilians may look good on paper, but in reality was difficult practice due to the opposition being so heavily entrenched with the local population. Foxtrot noted that small gestures can go a long way in gaining support of Afghans, even in less than ideal situations:

It is especially embarrassing to the man of the house to bust his door down and search his home and family. ...there are ways to handle it properly, certainly a public apology in front of the household if they didn't turn out to be anything is fairly effective if it's done right. Also, if you compensate them for the door you may have broken might help as well. (Foxtrot)

These deeds can surely help in trying to make the best of mistakes, but they do not help in the overall disrespect of foreign troops occupying the Afghans land. If troops were fighting insurgents, most certainly it would have negative effects on

some portion of the civilian population. Any effort to win their hearts and minds after these actions would most certainly prove futile.

At the same time, troops are struggling to win the trust and support of Afghans; troops feel the need to trust the civilian population as well. One of the soldiers mentioned that, “both sides of the fights (U.S. forces and the opposition) used civilians in the fight.” In order for either side to be effective they must be able to trust and build respect with these civilians. As mentioned in the previous section on money and loyalty, many of the troops felt that Afghans played both sides for various reasons. This led to distrust among the troops in using civilians for support and information. The distrust then led to a loss of respect for Afghans as a whole for some of the troops. As a result of these reactions, relationships between U.S. forces and civilians would suffer. It could then be analyzed that this produced a feedback effect that diminished relations between these groups. As soldiers lost trust and respect, they would then tend to interact with Afghans less. This would allow the opposition to play bigger roles in the Afghan civilians’ lives, swaying them more towards the cause of the opposition. This in turn leads to more distrust and the pattern continues.

Ultimately, one soldier summed up the trust and respect between troops and Afghans, asking how can there be trust with “Civil strife, accidental deaths, and the galling image of foreign troops present in one's country.” Soldiers realize that good relationships are the cornerstone to the hearts and minds strategy; however, they also realize that even though the U.S. might have more military might than the opposition, winning on the battlefield can have negative effects on

with a civilian population. In the end, “Counterinsurgency strategy is about commitment, the biggest guy doesn’t always win, the smaller opposition side can be more convincing.”

Another aspect of loss of trust and respect between troops and Afghans came from their daily interactions when working and living together. Issue of troops treating Afghans as second-class citizens were noted by a number of interviewees:

So the Afghans clean the restrooms there [on an unnamed U.S. Base]... And they [U.S. troops] were disgusting, they wouldn't flush the toilets and they were just being huge messes, if you know what I mean, daily. If I was an Afghan person cleaning up after these American, Afghan and NATO forces every day, day after day, and there was crap everywhere, and he didn't respect the most basic function of life that way... I don't know what I would think of us [U.S. troops] because it is disgusting. These people [U.S. troops] don't do these things in the United States. Part of it was just trying to be mean... (Bravo)

Encounters like this were sure to leave a lasting negative impression on the Afghans working on the U.S. bases and ultimately taking these experiences back to the communities they lived in.

5.5 Cultural Compatibility

U.S. forces entered Afghanistan under the idea that they are *liberators*. Afghans and even some U.S. troops see the ongoing campaign as *occupation*. What can be agreed on by both sides, according to the troops, is that there is a huge cultural divide between the United States and Afghans. This was seen through the troops views in three areas; troops appearance, class discrimination, and governing styles. In each of these areas troops pointed out divides that would negatively affect their relationships with Afghan civilians and their goals of

counterinsurgency. After their deployments and experienced express the need for U.S. troops to simply, “leave the country and give them back their own way of life.”

When asked what the best action U.S. troops can take to better the relationships with Afghan civilians, one respondent wanted to make clear that troops not forget that, “we [U.S. forces] are guests in their country.” This idea of U.S. troops as guests was then analyzed against the reaction some troops had against the appearance of U.S. troops. As troops are deployed in the country, they wear military uniforms, carry weapons and drive armored vehicles. This combined with living in fortified bases creates an ominous presence to those who must now live with it. It can be deduced that any population, Afghans included, would have trouble welcoming such a sight in their communities. This scene most likely would put a population on the defensive based on first impressions. Combine this with a lack of communication due to language barriers and different cultural mannerisms and customs and it can be assumed that Afghans would tend to trust their own people, *oppressors* or not, over U.S. troops.

The next aspect of cultural compatibility, as it relates to how U.S. troops related to Afghans, is class discrimination. When asked what negative effects U.S. presence can have on Afghanistan, one respondent answered, “Some soldiers...treated civilians as lower class because their culture is different than ours.” While not asked this directly, most troops interviewed alluded to the fact that they did not have much experience with cultures outside the ones they were brought up in. This lack of experience and limited education and training on

foreign culture, as mentioned previously, combined to leave troops at a disadvantage when asked to interact and relate with local populations. A common response to not fully understanding someone's culture is to treat them as if they are not on the same level as you. Troops' views of a rural Afghan lifestyle were sometimes construed in terms of "lower class", "oppressive towards women", and "poor." These views can inhibit relationship building on both sides of the table. Troops may not come into Afghan communities with an open mind or feel that Afghans are on the same level as them, whereas Afghans might become defensive towards negative or disrespectful views towards their culture or societal values:

The treatment of women and children was a very big shock to me because I have children of my own and it was tough seeing them treated as lower than a dog. The women just had no say in anything. I guess it was getting better as time went on but it wasn't quite what I expected. You go to another country and you expect to be in the United States no matter what. They (The US government and media) should tell us you're going to see tough situations and you cannot do anything about it; you just have to let it happen... I realized I'm in another country and these are their laws. Even if they are totally different than ours I still have my beliefs. (Delta)

The last and most common cultural compatibility issue brought up by troops surveyed was that of governing styles. Troops quickly realized that Afghans did not respond well to the U.S. system of central government. They explained that Afghanistan was broken up into many cultures and tribes that had few common ideological goals or histories. As troops began building a government for Afghans and placing community members in positions of power, allegations of abuse of this power along with corruption became common. This plan to make Afghans conform to U.S. standards had a negative effect and caused a backlash towards troops. One of the troops surveyed explained:

Any positive effects will likely be undone when we leave. Government will implode because of corruption. We've forced democracy on a culture that isn't ready or willing to accept democracy. We have cultivated a whole new generation of potential insurgents and terrorists.

This analysis of the situation falls in line with other analysis within this thesis; cultural differences can block the formation of relationships and that any actions pushed upon a cultural based on preconceived or not fully understood ideals can lead to pushback against the ideals and those making the assumptions.

5.6 Danger

As a result of the Hearts and Minds discourse, troops would be limited to strict criteria as to when they could engage Afghans with force. This led to uneasiness within the ranks as troops felt it tied their hands in possible life threatening situations. This added danger became a deterrent to troops engaging with civilians.

As a result of this added danger, the majority of troops felt more troops and U.S. bases would help with the *hearts and minds* strategy by making it safer for troops to interact with local populations. This, however, would be in direct conflict with previous statements about troops being an imposing force over civilian populations. It was noted that troops in uniform and bases built near communities created distrust and resentment as troops would be viewed as *occupiers* rather than *liberators*. Now, due to the *hearts and minds* counterinsurgency strategy, troops would be forced to make a decision between their safety and *liberating* a foreign country. One participant, Alpha, described

how the dangers of IED's and the perceptions of those that placed them changed his attitude towards the hearts and minds campaign:

After almost getting blown up I thought it was much more important to appear that I trusted those people that I was around, so that they didn't feel that they needed to kill me or would want to kill me. (Alpha)

Golf responded with his own take on the situation:

It is easier to agree with the strategy when the hearts and minds don't shoot back and to be gentler with the civilians when you don't have to deal with the civilians and don't worry about getting shot or blown up. (Golf)

For the troops, their own personal safety came first, as would be expected. However, it is surprising that a strategy would be formed that would place them in this dilemma in the first place.

Another aspect of dangers to troops affecting their ability to efficiently employ the hearts and minds strategy is the idea of Afghans helping themselves. One respondent noted that, "where U.S./NATO troops have positive interaction, we are having success in combating terrorists." Troops commonly felt that positive interactions would lead to better relationships with civilians. This would allow troops to share some of the roles and dangers when fighting the opposition. Foxtrot added to the danger discussion by describing how the ANA and ANP forces helped offset problems faced by U.S. troops. "The Army (ANA) is a reasonably respected institution in Afghanistan and the police (ANP) are becoming better," noted Foxtrot, "Actually engaging with the enemy wasn't a problem. They never showed cowardice." Any additional help from Afghans took U.S. troops out of dangerous situations. This could free up troops from blame during combat operations and allow the troops more of an opportunity to carry out operations focused on building a better report with Afghans.

When asked what troops felt the best action Afghan civilians could take to better the relationship with U.S. troops, one respondent wanted Afghans to “report information of enemy activity and become actively involved in improving their own security.” This role sharing, ideally, would prevent troops from being in dangerous situations. It would also mean that the troops could achieve the goal of handing over all responsibilities of combating operations to the Afghan communities themselves.

Ironically, this would be a similar situation as to how the Taliban, labeled by the U.S. as one of the main opposition groups, came into power. The Taliban, a group made of mostly Afghans, wanted to police their own country combat the oppression of foreign fighters and local warlords. The U.S. still hopes its own style of government formed in Afghanistan will take root and allow for a more moderate governing of its people. However, one of the troops interviewed noted that, “Afghanistan is dangerous and Afghans are experts at insurgency.” Only time will tell if the current Afghan government can hold on to power after the U.S. troops leave, and if they fail, who will take their place.

6. Reflections

As the thesis concludes, a final analysis will be given tying relevant historical facts, prior literature and as well as current discourse and policies to that of troop's experiences in the Afghan conflict. These connections will help add to the discussion of problems that arise from foreign intervention and imperialistic pursuits under the guise of liberation and counterinsurgency.

This thesis offers the diverse and synonymous experiences U.S. troops have with Afghan society. They are actors and characters in propaganda and policy discourses claiming liberation and the battle for Afghan *hearts and minds*. Their identities are shaped through western public imaginations and experiences while based as foreign others in Afghanistan promoting a hegemonic vision. I wanted to locate U.S. service members' perceptions as participants in this war and their relationship with Afghan society. Through focusing on their descriptions of the roles and groups involved in this relationship, I offer an analysis of the gendered nuances and power relationships expected in the propaganda and policy. Expectations put forth in the discourses are both reflected and challenged in participant's narratives.

The U.S. troops surveyed overwhelmingly believed it was their duty to perform missions assigned to them by the U.S. military in Afghanistan. They did not see their presence as one to foster geopolitics or gender justice but instead to give freedom to a people who they described as not always welcoming towards them. Their shared experience was being the foreign military other in Afghanistan during different years with varying responsibilities garnering different

proximities and relationships with Afghans. As this project focused on the relationship with Afghan society and the described roles and expectations in the discourse, it only offers the U.S. perspective which is limited in understanding the complex dynamics of the associations. Overall they agreed it was a complicated affiliation where they believed in their purpose as *liberators* while being defined by Afghan society as *occupiers*. While my explanation of the discourses show a supportive characterization of troops purpose and roles in Afghanistan, they perceived their portrayal in the media to be shallow, unfair and stereotyped. This builds upon the idea that Afghan society was objectified in a superficial fashion through a gendered dichotomy, obscuring complex systems and identities.

I asked those surveyed to describe their perceptions of Afghans and relationships with their society. The groups defined in the intervention and discourses reflected roles based on the vision and expectations of hegemonic strategy. The troops reflected as part of the research on themselves as U.S. service members as well as, Afghan civilians, insurgents and the government and security forces.

Afghan civilians while portrayed in the propaganda as *victims*, were only sometimes referred to as such by participants. Instead, this description complicated the static narrative of the portraying the society through the feminine. Often they were called survivors whose actions were thought of as influenced by a combination of politics and ignorance. Sometimes narratives further objectified the people through an infantilized description claiming Afghans were helpless without foreign support. Many participants cited past militaries

occupations in Afghanistan is what had led to their present society, impacting them in a negative way. However, these militaries were often seen as dissimilar interventions. U.S. troops perceived them to be based in Afghanistan to support Afghans, not for the direct benefit of the United States. Respondents were divided whether or not the people wanted the support of the U.S. troops. Their presence, while providing some opportunities for women, also exposed that their “restrictive” norms could not just be attributed to Taliban, but Afghan society and culture. Afghan civilians were often described as proud with a strong sense of family and community. U.S. troop presence at times shamed these men through their mission and combat. While troops believed they themselves reflected identities of good guys there to help, they knew very well that Afghans often didn’t agree. They also were confounded with the predicaments that while Afghans suffered before their invasion; their presence also brought fighting and a heavy toll on Afghans lives and security. In addition, they could complicate the lives of civilians, because asking for their assistance could put them in further danger. Many claimed that Afghans loyalty could only be rented not bought. Since the *hearts and minds* doctrine placed a shared responsibility of fighting the insurgency between civilians the state and foreign troops, a shared commitment was expected. However, civilian allegiances to troops were as neutral as they were often towards insurgents. Many explained this as a survival technique by the Afghans, albeit a frustrating one in the eyes of U.S. troops, as it hindered their vision for success. Loyalty went two ways, and the troops claimed Afghans wanted to know how loyal the occupation would be to the people so they could

also hedge their bets. Civilians have been used by both sides and assisted the hegemony and insurgencies at the same time.

Troops' perceptions of the insurgency were fairly synonymous with both the propaganda and policy discourses. Nearly all descriptions were about their oppression and they were clearly defined as the enemy and "bad guy." They sometimes disagreed with the propaganda that perceived the opposition as backwards or stupid, saying that this didn't give them credit for their tactical abilities. Respondents said civilians were neutral towards the insurgency due to this group's brutal tactics carried out to coerce support. This group probably had the most superficial description offered by U.S. troops and the least amount of communication with them. This group, and the perceptions of them, further reinforced the troops' perception of themselves as the obvious *good guy* against this conflicting masculinity. These participants discussed asymmetrical tactics used by the insurgency such as blending into the civilian population. They felt that this was unfair and that overall the enemy used unconventional tactics that were difficult to compete against a large traditional military. Ironically, they did not see or comment on how the force of international troops handed down on the country was also used asymmetrically in the Afghan arena.

Participants were most confused by their relationship with and identity of the Afghan government and security forces. The discourses had claimed that those within this role were partners in Afghan *liberation* and state-building, and therefore wanted a legitimate country with freedoms for its people. However, the troops described rampant corruption within this group based on their standards

and were unsure if this group was a healthy power structure for the Afghan people. In both discourses they had been told that this group was the Afghan face of the *good guy* role. Through this relationship there was often distrust. They also heavily agreed that Afghan civilians did not trust or support this group. This is problematic for them since this was supposedly the people who would be taking over the country once foreign forces exited. Local tribal leadership on the other hand was seen as the best means of a system that works for the people. The troops were frustrated by the little connection the Afghan government had with its people. This also led to U.S. troop role confusion about the methods of liberation through developing a problematic regime and expecting the people to support it.

Base host relationships were further seen as complicated due to cultural compatibility. However while the variations of culture were repeated as a reason for the problematic relations, power dynamics were not seen as an issue. There was little recognition of imperialism or occupation, other than knowing that people inside and outside perceived them in that similar role. Participants either reinforced a dehumanizing or simple characterization of Afghans and superior ideas of the U.S. or prided themselves on a deep analysis and understanding of their humanity based on their read and experienced knowledge of the people. Education was a common theme and many answered that it was needed to improve this relationship, whether it was teaching troops to be more respectful to their host society or for Afghans to improve their livelihoods. In conclusion I would like to offer the troops responses to the tea party exercise.

6.1 The Tea Party

Some of the troops interviewed through e-mail were given the opportunity to describe their thoughts on Afghanistan and their own perceptions of their time in the country. These are reflections after they have returned home to the U.S., their memories of serving in Afghanistan based on experiences that occurred months to a decade earlier. This exercise allows soldiers to add their own conclusions and thoughts to the process of this study. The questions posed to the respondents are as follows:

If you were to be the host one Afghan person for tea, who would it be? Use your imagination please. I want you to describe to me the: who, what, why, when, where, and how of this encounter. Imagine you are unrestricted by language. No translator needed. How would you dress? How would they? Describe this person for me. You could have met this person or they could be based on your knowledge or perception of Afghans. It could be an average citizen or public figure. Whoever you personally if given the chance would want to talk to. They could be in any group whether devout to opposition, corruption, civil or civilian Life? Man or woman, you have the opportunity to communicate freely with this person. What American and Afghan cultural norms would you include? What would you talk about? What would you say about your time in Afghanistan and interpretation of their culture? Would weapons be present? How would you sit? Describe the scenario and your related emotions.

Below are the responses for those troops that decided to participate. These are unedited to allow the troops to have their voices, often overshadowed or hidden by discourse, media or social constructs, heard in full.

Right now I don't have a burning desire to talk with anyone in Afghanistan. It might be interesting to talk with an Al-Qaeda leader and see why they do what they do. (Bravo)

Bravo's response shows a disinterest in communicating directly with people but rather with engaging the idea of terrorism and its basis through the group becoming symbolic of the term in the last decade Al Qaeda. Asking to speak with

leadership and their actions source reveals that troops may feel confused by the actual reasons behind political violence as opposed to the rhetoric offered usually on superficial levels of Islamic extremism and hating American freedom.

I don't really know how to approach this. I can say without a shadow of a doubt that there isn't a single Afghan, living, dead, real, or archetypal that I would ever want to sit down and have tea with. If forced into such an encounter, I would dress as I do normally today, in a polo and cargo pants. In regards to norms, I would treat the whole encounter no differently than having coffee (I hate tea) with anyone else. Pre-arranged meeting in a coffee shop, sit at a table, etc (no way in hell is an Afghan getting in my house). No weapons, not really necessary. I don't think I would talk about anything. Just drink silently, stare at them, and leave. At the end of the day, despite two years and three months in their country I have no interest in the Afghan people, no common ground, no shared experience, no nostalgia for that shit hole place or its residents. (Golf)

Once again a different interviewee is disinterested in meeting an Afghan after they have returned home, adamantly this time. Golf uses the word 'forced' to describe what kind of encounter would take place if he were made to do so. He would make the meeting public and would refuse ever letting an Afghan into his home. The level of distrust here is strong even at an imaginative level, further complicating Alpha Yankee explanations on trust and respect. This comment is especially interesting in that foreign militaries have a certain expectation and self-asserted right to enter the homes of Afghans either peacefully or destructively as part of their missions and security measures. He goes on to explain if he were sitting with them he would refuse to speak to them. This exemplifies how difficult the relationship between foreign troops and Afghans must have been and the public and political expectations to build a state through this association.

If I were to host an Afghan for a tea party, it would either be an ANA or an ANP commander. I would host these people because they are in my mind the most important people in helping coalition forces leave Afghanistan in a relatively peaceful state. I would hold this tea party at one of their bases so that I can see the status of their forces first hand and judge what more can be done to strengthen their forces. I would hold this meeting at their bases because it might help reinforce the idea that they will have to take the lead when we leave their

country. Many ANA or ANP assume that the coalition forces will continue to supply them after we have left and will give them our equipment when we leave, and they rely on coalition forces to supply them with the resources needed to sustain operations. By holding the meeting at their base, they will not see what coalition forces have and then I can explain to them that the equipment that we use will be taken with us, and they will have to set up their own logistical system to sustain themselves.

For greetings, I would shake their hand first and then place my hand over my heart and nod, which is what I have seen many Afghans do. I would hold the tea party on a table and chairs instead of on the ground with pillows and sitting Indian style, because while local elders may do this, I believe that the ANA and the ANP would look more professional by sitting at a table with chairs. First I would talk about any personal matters about the person I am talking with, such as family and health, to help connect with this person. Then I would discuss military matters such as training, logistics, planned operations and how they can take more responsibility. Personally, during this type of encounter I would try to be as diplomatic as possible, but I know I would feel a little frustrated because to me the ANA and the ANP still rely on coalition forces too much and that they don't want to make the necessary changes to help their own forces.

I would not personally be armed to show that I can trust them but the people with me would be armed because of incidents of ANA or ANP shooting at coalition forces. I would not tell them about how I feel about certain aspects of their culture because I believe that this might upset them and I would like to maintain as good a relationship as possible. (Hotel)

Hotel changes the course of these responses in wanting to engage with someone that troops have a high level of contact with the Afghan National Security Forces. His request to hold the meeting on their base as opposed to an American base is to not encourage the Afghan commander to believe he can keep American resources after the withdrawal. He encourages their self-sustainability and reinforces that throughout the response that in order to be successful, Afghan forces will need to implement their own logistics. These comments relay the tension of dependence that has been built up through the war between not only militaries but also governments. He mentions developing a rapport with them first to develop a connection and believes that sitting in chairs and tables is more professional for members of the military than the traditional seating for tea. However, he shows a balance to this Western standard by

saying that he would mimic an Afghan greeting of respect after shaking their hand.

I find this question a bit weird. I have had tea with many Afghans. I don't see how having a hypothetical tea party is really relevant unless this is a psychological experiment. If you want me to go into detail about my actual experience with locals during meetings that included tea, please don't hesitate to ask.

However, if I was able to host one Afghan person for tea it would be whoever is currently the most influential and effective Taliban leader. I would let him have a sip of tea, then promptly kill him. (Mike)

Mike is put off by the question and finds the experiment irrelevant. However his response is incredibly poignant. His guest would be a dominant Taliban leader in order to kill him, only "letting" him first sip his tea. This answer explains how troops still despise and want to kill their enemy even when they are no longer in the same arena. This response summarizes how soldiers in the study viewed their opponents – they still discredit them and their intense opinions about them remain.

Complicated question that deserves a simple answer, I think. I would choose to sit with a young Afghan man, perhaps thirty-five, who has seen the evolution of his nation's history close up for the past twenty-years. I would dress in Afghan dress, ideally, which simply means the loose fitting pants and shirt, a vest, and appropriate hat. I would bring with me pictures of my family and my home, as well as modest gifts, to share with him. I would want to have traditional Afghan music playing, live, in the background. There would be weapons present, I imagine, but they would be set aside, out of reach, as a matter of trust.

I would hope to engage in a very, very long and deliberate conversation with this individual in a way that makes clear my genuine interest in his thoughts, experiences, background, hopes and fears, interests, family and friends. Likewise, I would want to share with him my experiences in his country, as well as my experiences in life outside of Afghanistan and, then, try to communicate how, in my view, my interaction with him and his country is as valuable to me as any other experience I've enjoyed in my life. I think it would be difficult to communicate my personal sense of genuine admiration for him and his country and its people, as well as for the incredible challenges they have endured over the decades, but I would try to accomplish that.

I would want to speak his language – though I do not, right now – rather than expecting him to speak mine, and I would like to have enough expertise with his traditions to ensure that he knows I know his traditions, respect them, and find them productive and useful.

And, I would want to do this more than once – often – to build a true friendship with this young man and, hopefully, he might one day visit me and my family in the United States.

I think that would be about perfect. (Oscar)

Oscar's answer is by far one of the most optimistic scenarios. This participant genuinely believed in the potential for what had been imagined for Afghanistan in an ideal hegemonic intervention that allowed for a successful transition of power. He shows a genuine interest in understanding Afghanistan and its people and this offer the opportunity to do so it would be interesting to see his reflection on what he learned. For as much as U.S. troops can understand about Afghanistan, what can these lessons teach outsiders about intervention? As the cycle of these endeavors continue, it seems as though lessons learned are not absorbed into prevention of further hegemonic incursions tragic to these host communities and the foreign militaries that reside on their land. Oscar relies heavily on mimicking in this scenario as a way to develop comfort and build rapport with his guest, describing the most orientalist practices of these encounters. He seems to desperately want to communicate well with great understanding and also to be understood; although he seems to have a certain sorrow in perhaps not being able to convey his empathy for Afghan's history. Although he would be wearing Afghan garb, he doesn't comment on if his identity is problematic in this encounter or Afghan history as a member of a foreign military. He seems to genuinely want to develop a relationship through trust and respect as opposed to trying to win his heart or mind for military strategy. I am unsure how many troops feel they would want to have a similar scenario, but Oscar seems to break down the personal barriers and animosity that many troops explained being built up through the course of the war in their opinions about Afghans.

I would choose to speak to Ahmad Shah Massoud, the Lion of Panjshir. I imagine that he would be dressed as he usually was in life--Pashtun garb with a

vest and some military gear. He would be wearing a sweet pakool (the Pashtun hat) that I always saw him wearing in photos. As far as weapons, I wouldn't be too concerned with having one. Had he not been assassinated on September 9, 2001, I think that he would have been our biggest supporter and a natural choice for President of Afghanistan.

We would ideally be at one of his base camps, sitting under some trees or on the wall of a centuries old fortress made out of mud and stone. We'd drink tea, of course, and hopefully there would be lamb for dinner. I miss lamb from the Middle East and Afghanistan. Lamb over here just doesn't ever taste as good.

As far as conversation, I would like to ask him how he sees Afghanistan fitting into our ever shrinking world and where he sees his countrymen in 50 years. Would he have any recommendations for how to help his nation develop, or would he advocate leaving his country as it is, free from the pressures and stresses that education and entrance into the global economy surely brings? I would share my concerns--focused mainly on the lack of education, the dangerous mixture of politics and religion, and his country's lack of respect for women. I would also want to know about his feelings towards the NGO's present in his country during a time of war, and whether he felt the charity was of net benefit or ultimately fostered a dependence upon outside assistance, eroding Afghan "self-reliance."

Finally, if I could go back in time to have this conversation in August of 2001, I would tell Ahmad not to trust Arabs in his country. There aren't too many Arabs in Afghanistan that aren't there to foment trouble or push their own ideological agenda. Of course, the same could be said about us, but I like to feel that we have the benefit of at least not being the types of folks that pose as journalists and then detonate bombs hidden inside of video cameras. Of course, I am totally discounting Fidel Castro's exploding cigars. No, I don't count those at all. (Uniform)

My choice would be the Lion of Panjshir – Ahmad Shah Massoud.

As his biographer states, “an engineering student turned military leader who played a vital role in driving the Soviet Army out of Afghanistan.” Moreover, “he strongly rejected the interpretations of Islam followed by the Taliban, or Al Qaeda.”

With a little research, one can easily see the impact Ahmad had on, not only the local population, but the Afghanistan populous.

To sit down and have tea, or chi, would be a momentous experience, indeed. He is one of few people who, in recent history, has been able to bring the population together, regardless of tribal affiliation for the betterment of the country. That, in and of itself, is noteworthy to a more in-depth conversation.

He was a student – I am a student.

He was a seeker – I am a seeker.

He was healer – I am a healer.

He is a warrior – I am a warrior.

To this end, it appears that his ideological beliefs and my own run parallel and we would have much in common.

To Ahmad, I would thank him for allowing me time in his beautiful country because, as a result of my time there, my life has drastically and forever been changed for the better. No longer do I take things for granted and let time slowly slip away. Now I seize every opportunity to make my life, and the lives of those around me, better – as it appears he did, also.

There would absolutely not be any weapons present – period.

My emotional state would be inquisitive, curious, and happy.

My body language would mimic his and we would sit crossed-legged on the floor or seated at a table; whatever he chose.

My underlying goal would just be to learn about him, why he believes what he does, and hopefully utilize that knowledge in my everyday life. I would also want to impart some knowledge I've gained and bridge a connection with him, ensuring us more opportunities to talk and learn from one another.

To summarize, I would like to use his quote as it serves to only reiterate why I would want to talk and learn from him:

"It is our conviction and we believe that both men and women are created by the Almighty. Both have equal rights. Women can pursue an education, women can pursue a career, and women can play a role in society -- just like men." (Whiskey)

Uniform and Whiskey both want to meet the same man, posthumously, Ahmad Shah Massoud. How these troops describe him and they both happened to ask to meet him is not coincidental, reflecting the iconization of the anti-Taliban leader who was killed two days before 9/11 by al-Qaeda. They both paint a romanticized notion of the man who has become symbolic in the fight against the Taliban. Their flattery shows how a man that was never met but yet idolized by the troops in that they have shared the same enemy. As Massoud didn't live to see the invasion, his response or approach to assisting the U.S. is speculative. However they describe a man that would have been a benevolent ally, in their imaginations they assume a commonality with Massoud and are pained that the U.S. and Afghanistan never had the alliance they believe they would have had he lived with Afghanistan. These responses highlight how strong the narratives of heroic and villainous masculinity have been in the perceptions of U.S. troops. Their accounts of Massoud fail to mention his own track record as a warlord unpopular with many Afghans and seem him in a light of virtue and heroism (Cunningham 2013).

I would want to meet with Gul Wali. He was the director of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) at Torkham Gate. I worked with Gul on my 2nd deployment to Afghanistan. We met every day and worked together to make our

mission successful. Gul was extremely dedicated to his work and to helping American troops.

I would want to meet with him just like we used to. I would go down to Torkham Gate and meet him at the gate of his compound and hug. He would invite me in and would have his workers lay out a spread of food and tea. We would sit on the floor and just chat about life (no business) and eat. We would not discuss work or operational stuff until the end.

I get pretty nostalgic about this a lot of times. Life just seemed simpler then compared to now even though it was dangerous. I imagine that Gul and I could just meet right now and pick up where we left off. Gul was generous enough to give me some Afghan gifts when I left including some gifts for my family. (Victor)

Victor offered the only response of an Afghan he actually personally knew and worked with. His narrative is unique in that he believed a genuine rapport had been developed with this man during his deployment. The close contact he wanted to share was exclusive in this response. His nostalgia contradicts those who want to avoid Afghans after their time in the arena as he wants to “pick up” the relationship where he left off. His memories include a genuine fondness with an Afghan person he worked with and come to know on some personal level, which seems unique in these relationships. Although business would be on the docket, he didn’t include comments that he had to be critical or give lessons to Mr. Gul Wali.

6.2 Future Study

While I believe this study provided insight into troops’ views on a variety of subjects regarding their roles in Afghanistan and foreign policy as a whole, this study has revealed areas of future study. With proper access and resources, a parallel study from the Afghan point of view could be very informational with regards to these topics. Afghans would have different experiences, access, and perceptions to the chain of events studied in this thesis. Having firsthand

knowledge of the relationships formed with U.S. troops could complete the picture and be compared to those given by the respondents here. Surveys and interviews with Afghans could confirm or disprove soldiers' ideas towards each of the Afghan groups mentioned. These results could be valuable in identifying which of the troop's viewpoints were perceived or factual. They could also provide understandings of alternate roles and gender not identified through the experiences of American troops.

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8. List of Abbreviations

ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
AQ	Al Qaeda
COIN	Counterinsurgency
DOD	Department of Defense
GWOT	Global War on Terror
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
RAWA	Revolutionary Afghan Womens Association
U.S.	United States

9. Appendix A: Base Host Relationships in Afghanistan (Survey)

Base Host Study

1.

The American University in Cairo
Base Host Relationships in Afghanistan
Sarah Cosette

Welcome to "Base Host Relationships in Afghanistan," an academic study that examines some of the intimate dynamics between American soldiers and Afghan civilians during the current conflict. This study is being conducted by Ms. Sarah Cosette in Las Vegas, Nevada as part of her graduate degree requirements at the American University in Cairo. Before taking part in this study, please read the consent form below and sign/print your name at the bottom of the page if you understand the statements and freely consent to participate in the study.

Base Host Study

2. Consent Agreement

Consent Form

This study involves survey and interview based research designed to understand how American soldiers define their roles as soldiers in foreign military installations. How do they perceive cultural understanding, communal relations and their affect on Afghan civilians the country? In addition how are American soldiers and veterans affected by Afghan civilians and communities? The study is being conducted by Ms. Sarah Cosette, a master's degree candidate of The American University in Cairo (AUC). It has been approved by the AUC Institutional Review Board (IRB). No deception is involved, and the study understands the risk to participants as follows.

This survey and or interview will ask you to recall experiences and perceptions based on your familiarity and memories while as a military member in Afghanistan. These recollections may promote a range of emotions. While the intent of this study is not to inconvenience you in any manner, the researcher acknowledges that the questions may cause discomfort either now or after the study. Please skip questions that you prefer not to answer or stop if you wish to discontinue the survey or interview at any time. Please return the survey, whether it has been fully completed or not to the test administrator.

Please accept a list of resources available to veterans. Some of these listings will be indicated as especially helpful when supporting emotional and stress related counseling services. Please contact these organizations with any questions about all that they have to offer since they operate to serve you.

Participation in the survey typically takes 45 minutes. Participants' real names will not be used in any part of the results or published work. In fact, names are not asked for and your identity is strictly anonymous unless you indicate your willingness to participate in the personal interview and discuss the subjects of the study more thoroughly. The principal investigator, her assistant and academic advisor will exclusively know these participants by name. All other parties involved and those reviewing the findings whether the project is in draft or completed form will know your responses by an identification number or manufactured named. Participants begin by answering a series of questions about their personal demographics. The remaining five sections will consist of various questions related to base host relationships in Afghanistan.

At the end of the survey, participants have the option to leave their contact information if they wish to be interviewed further on these subjects. If you agree to a personal interview you will have the opportunity to discuss anonymously the subject of this study and provide a more detailed context so that the research report reflects deeper background and description than what is based solely on the survey. If you want to be considered for an interview, please leave your contact information on the last page and your schedule and what city you live in. Your consideration for all your involvement and service is respected and the desired outcome of this study is designed to benefit both military and foreign host communities. Interviews will assist and further support the need to provide context for this social study. While responses and results will be discussed and published in the paper, in no case will responses be attributed to individual participants.

If participants have further questions about this study or their rights, or if they wish to lodge a complaint or concern, they may contact the principal investigator, Ms. Cosette. Her email related to this study is basehoststudy@gmail.com and her office phone number is 702-637-6540. The academic advisor for the project is Dr. Amy Homes, Academic Advisor and Professor at AUC's Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology and Egyptology. Her contact information is: holmes@aucegypt.edu.

Please proceed to the next page to begin the survey after selecting the following option.

*** 1. If you are 18 years of age or older, understand the statements above, and freely consent to participate in the study, please sign and print your name and checkmark the "I Agree" box.**

If you do not want to participate in this survey, please sign and print your name and checkmark the "I Do Not Agree" box. Please proceed to return the survey to Ms. Cosette or the administrator who gave you the survey.

I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY AND COMPLETE THE ATTACHED SURVEY.

I DO NOT AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY AND WILL NOT COMPLETE THE ATTACHED SURVEY.

Base Host Study

3. AFGHAN SERVICE

* 1. Have you ever served in Afghanistan as part of the American Military since 2001?

Yes

No

Base Host Study

4. DEMOGRAPHIC & BACKGROUND INFO

1. Your current age:

18-23

24-29

30-35

36-41

42+

2. Are you:

Male

Female

3. Military Status:

Current Military

Veteran

4. What foreign countries have you been based in while serving in the military?

Please answer the following questions based on your circumstances while serving in the American military ONLY while in Afghanistan.

5. Branch: (Choose all that apply)

Army

Navy

Marine Corps

Air Force

Coast Guard

6. Age while actively in Afghanistan: (Choose all that apply)

18-23

24-29

30-35

36-41

42+

7. Base Structure(s) type that you lived in: (FOB, COB, Outpost etc)

Base Host Study

12. How was your time spent with local Afghan civilians:

Base Host Study

5. BASE HOST RELATIONSHIPS & CIVILIAN SUPPORT

1. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

The American described, "Mission to Win the Hearts & Minds of the Afghan People is...."

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Possible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An effective and successful military strategy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working well while you were deployed in the country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. ...Being Won or Lost Overall?

Won

Lost

Not Sure

3. The American described, "Mission to Win the Hearts & Minds of the Afghan People...."

	More	Less	Same	Not Sure
Works better with more, less or the same number of soldiers?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Works better with more, less or the same number of bases?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is more effective from the use of more or less combat?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Needs more or less American Non-Military efforts?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Needs more or less security contract firms assisting US Military?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. What do you feel is the BEST action American troops can take- to better the relationships with Afghan civilians?

5. What do you feel is the WORST action American troops can take- that would result in harming the relationships with Afghan civilians?

Base Host Study

6. PREPARATION & EDUCATION

1. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
It is important for American forces to receive education and training about their host community, society and culture.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You received enough training about Afghan community, society and culture BEFORE you came to Afghanistan.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You received enough training about Afghan community; society and culture WHILE you were in Afghanistan.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. What areas of training and education would you have liked more training on to assist you with your goals in Afghanistan?

3. What is something you wish Afghan civilians better understood about you?

4. What is something you wish you could better understand about Afghan civilians?

Base Host Study

7. MISSION: OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

1. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
The Afghan people SHOULD be liberated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Afghan people WANT to be liberated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is the responsibility of American forces to bring justice to Afghanistan.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. Who or what do Afghan civilians need to be protected from?

Some of you may have had the opportunity to interact with a range of different groups that make up Afghan society. If this is the case: you may describe general or average qualities across the country- or you may indicate and describe the group you were most familiar with.

3. Briefly describe Afghan men's (personality, attitude, manners, etc):

4. Briefly describe Afghan women's (personality, attitude, manners, etc):

5. Briefly describe the Afghan youth's (personality, attitude, manners, etc):

6. Briefly describe Afghan society, culture and values:

Base Host Study

8. US FORCES PURPOSE & RESPONSIBILITY

1. What do you feel is the primary purpose the American Government has for deploying American forces to Afghanistan?

2. What are positive effects of American troop presence in Afghanistan?

3. What are negative effects of American troop presence in Afghanistan?

4. Briefly describe American soldiers in Afghanistan (personality, attitude, manners, etc):

Various voices that discuss and debate this conflict offer opposing labels about American military presence in Afghanistan. On one end some offer the term "occupation" while those that disagree may describe it as "liberation."

5. Do you see yourself and actions more as those of an occupier or liberator?

Occupier

Liberator

Both

Neither

Other (please specify)

6. Do you believe American military operations in Afghanistan will have a lasting impact on the country even after troops are gone?

Yes

No

Please Explain

7. What impact will or has Afghanistan or the people had on you after your presence there?

Base Host Study

9. IN CLOSING

1. Please provide your contact info if you are willing to be invited for an interview with the researcher.

NAME

STATE

PHONE and/or EMAIL:

2. Please write any additional information or comments here that you would like to offer or want to explain more thoroughly.

3. Please type your email address here if you would like a listing of resources available to veterans sent to you.

10. Appendix B: Interview Questions

- 1) Do you feel the average Afghan understands why foreign militaries are present in their country? Please explain why or why not?
- 2) How do American government agencies (DOJ, USAID, and State Dept. etc) relate to the Afghan population? How is this knowledge used in policy and procedure?
- 3) Do you feel tribal and local leadership is connected or has enough say in the GIRoA? Was it possible to balance tribal systems with a central unified power?
- 4) Based on your experiences and observations, what role does Islam play in Afghan society?
- 5) What are your observations and opinions related to Afghans administering power currently and after American forces exit?
- 6) Where are efforts best spent in Afghanistan? If you could devote more or less resources where and with whom would they be?
- 7) Please expand on the concept that it is difficult for Afghans to understand troops presence and difficult for troops to understand Afghans allegiances and fluid nature towards troops and insurgents.
- 8) Do you feel gender and cultural norms dictate that Afghan women are kept segregated and hidden because of the current and historical dangers in the country (war, soldiers, tribal conflict) or because it is a social practice to keep women as second class citizens? Also explain if both or neither of these assumptions is true.
- 9) What is the reality of insurgency? Describe how and why there is a blend of civilians and Taliban within the opposition? Did you find that civilians believed in Taliban ideology and leadership or were making alliances for survival and esteem?
- 10) What is the reality of counter insurgency? Did you find Afghan civilians to invest in the American mission? Did they seem to react differently towards your presence when "hearts and minds" was practiced? Please expand on the assessment of the "hearts and minds" campaign in Afghanistan that you offered in the survey.
- 11) What advice & warnings would you tell future generations of either American or foreign troops that may be deployed to Afghanistan either 5 months or 500 years from now?
- 12) What are the three main priorities you see as what needs to be focused on with American service members and veterans? What do you want understood about yourselves? (Both in the USA & internationally) It can or cannot include your time in Afghanistan. Please share.