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ARTICLE

Archipelagos of death: the assemblage of population-centric war in Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

How is the notion of success rearticulated in the contemporary context of endless counterinsurgencies (COIN)? To answer, the paper engages the thesis that the recent COIN campaigns were founded on a dysfunctional disconnect between the "hearts and minds" principles and the reality of the indefinite use of force. I show that this tension (called the "tactical trap") is not a pathology of COIN, but one of its productive sites. The tactical trap is an *assemblage of violence* that brings together the endless use of force and the population-centric narrative through the principle of *futurity*, i.e. an indeterminate horizon of "progress." Taking inspiration from the Critical War Studies and the Afghan warfare as a case study, I highlight the paradoxical nature of population-centric war: it is founded on a violence that makes COIN both a permanent state of failure and a probable success. The indeterminacy of violence is then analyzed as a new ordering of risk-management warfare, based on the everyday (re)invention of the potentiality of "progress."

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"We're Not Going to Turn Afghanistan into Switzerland"

"Social work with guns leads to counter-insurgencies without end" (Owens 2015, 246)

In July 2010, the US General David Petraeus took command of NATO forces (*International Security Assistant Force* – ISAF) and the US-led coalition *Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan after nine years of war and a significant intensification of combats since 2006[1]. In the context of the US *Surge* decided in 2009 by the President Barack Obama and the deployment of 33 000 supplementary soldiers, Petraeus presented his counterinsurgency plan entitled "Anaconda Strategy versus Insurgents." Estimated as the most ambitious plan of the Afghan campaign resulting from the US' and NATO's strategic reorientation towards a more formal population-centric focus, the objective was

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a large-scale reconstruction of the country aiming at surrounding (metaphor of the snake) the insurgency.[2] The plan combined numerous dimensions distributed along seven main axes (International, kinetics, non-kinetics, info ops, detainee ops, intelligence, politics) (Bolger 2015, 366–367).[3] At the same time, Petraeus declared in an interview to the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* that "We're Not Going to Turn Afghanistan into Switzerland." [. . .] [O]ur aspirations should be realistic" (Der Spiegel 2010). While the new commander of the war in Afghanistan proposed what was seen as the most complete approach ever elaborated in the campaign and attached to the population-centric model of COIN, he admitted, through the ironic and exaggerated comparison between Switzerland and Afghanistan, that the stabilization of this country could not be completely reached. The tension seems even more important that Petraeus cancelled the restrictions that his predecessor, Stanley McChrystal (commander of the international forces in Afghanistan in 2009–2010), put over the use of force to limit civilian damages. In his *Counterinsurgency guidance* elaborated for soldiers deployed on the Afghan theatre, Petraeus explains:

> "Pursue the enemy relentlessly. Together with our Afghan partners, get our teeth into the insurgents and don't let go. When the extremists fight, make them pay. Seek out those who threaten the population. Don't let them intimidate the innocent. Target the whole network, not just individuals" (2010).

The tensions in Petraeus' approach and the irony of this declaration could be explained by the US exit strategy that was behind the Surge. While Petraeus was in charge of theoretically reinforcing the centrality of the population in the campaign, as shows his plan, he had also to prepare the conditions for a US withdrawal, by making the campaign more kinetic, with more soldiers and firepower in order to fatally damage the insurgency and retreat as fast as possible from Afghanistan (Kaplan 2009). Nevertheless, the Afghan campaign offers numerous similar contradictions between the intensity of the military violence and its low level of efficiency. High-ranked military officers and soldiers regularly admitted the gap existing between the repetition of operations and the concrete (in)ability of international forces to control the disputed provinces. Dan McNeill, ISAF Commander in 2007–2008, often qualified the operations in Afghanistan by using a lexical field associated with uncertainty and expectations, as it was the case during a press conference at NATO HQ:

> "[T]his fighting season [. . .] we've had quite a *bit of success*, especially in the south. We *expect* to keep moving forward. We *expect* to keep that string of *successes* going and we *hope* by the time we get to what is typically called the winter lull we'll be in pretty shape and set ourselves for resuming the fight *next* year" (McNeill 2007 – Italic underlining maid by the author; see also Richards 2007, 28, 2014, 261).

The predecessor of Petraeus, Stanley McChrystal (2009–2011), one of the main advocates of the US *Surge* in Afghanistan and who was firmly decided to reorient the campaign towards an increase protection of populations (McChrystal 2009a) also warned less than two months only after he took command of international forces: "That is what we are *trying* to do [bringing security]. [. . .] But it's *going to take time. Success takes time*" (McChrystal quoted in Filkins 2009 – Italic underlining maid by the author).

Political and military officials never used the term "victory" to qualify the situation in Afghanistan, but more commonly commented on the campaign in terms of "success,"

"gains," "expectations," "progresses." "*It takes time*" was one of the main leitmotivs for justifying what progressively became termed as the "US longest war." In other words, the stabilization of Afghanistan was structurally seen less as a present reality, or at least, an oncoming stage, but as an uncertain and distant future, popularizing the idea that population centric-war was founded on a disconnect between the ideal principles of COIN (winning the "hearts and minds" of the local population) and the reality of the battlefield (characterized by an indefinite use of force). At the heart of this gap lies the thesis that the Afghan COIN campaign was locked into a "tactical trap": military actions were condemned to small-scale and short-term gains like the destruction of IED making cells, insurgency's members and infrastructures, or the temporary control of territorial portions.

Starting from this observation, the aim of the present paper is to question the reinvention of the notion of "success" in warfare through contemporary liberal COIN. How is the Western conduct of war (re)ordered in the context of endless uses of force? To do so, I address the widespread assumption according to which population-centric war in Afghanistan was structured by a dysfunctional separation between the political-strategic *theory* of COIN and the operational-tactical *practice* of COIN. Adopting a critical perspective, I intend to show that the tactical trap is not a pervasive effect or a misapplication of population-centric war, but one of its conditions of possibility. Relying on previous researches conceiving population-centric war as a "therapeutic" project aimed to indeterminately "cure" the global South from its chronic instability, my view is that the tactical trap consists in an *assemblage of violence* that brings together, in a very contested and contingent way, the endless use of force and the population-centric narrative of COIN through the principle of *futurity*. The short-term military "successes" in everyday practices such as land patrols, raids on villages and insurgents' compounds, as well as tactical air supports, maintained COIN in a continual and indefinite future horizon of "progress."

By doing so, the article first invites to understand the political-military rationality inhabiting the longevity of the contemporary conflicts involving Western forces, such as in Afghanistan. A major part of the strategic and critical literature about the war in Afghanistan pinpoints its "endless" nature, without explaining how such a prolonged (and apparently dysfunctional) use of violence makes rationally sense in the eyes of those who perform it (Gregory 2011, 238–239). Consequently, the article interrogates the definition of "success" in risk-management warfare.[4] It is often qualified as a type of warfare that aims at indefinitely manage the instabilities that it contributes to perpetuate. Nevertheless, very little attention has been paid to how success is defined, elaborated, conceived in such contexts where violence paradoxically seems to be a core dysfunctional mechanic in the militarized regime of global governance. My point here is that the reinvention of success through contemporary COIN is intrinsically connected to a globalized "necropolitics" (Mbembe 2019), characterized by timely spaced, geographically diffused but systematic and prolific production of "small massacres" (Shaw 2002) and archipelagos of death. Here is the site of the new making of success in warfare: population-centric war is founded on a military violence that makes COIN both a permanent state of failure (as small-scale victories assure only temporary and limited effects) and a probable political-strategic achievement (as small-scale victories were seen as necessary means to stabilize Afghanistan). This is precisely through this argumentative lens that I propose to understand the implications of the apparent contradictions in Petraeus' or McChrystal's views on Afghan warfare: the relative value they attributed to

the military effort in Afghanistan, even in its more intense and contradictive form under the US *Surge*, was not a recognition of failure, but a justification that futurized and postponed to an indefinite stage the peace promise of population-centric war.

The empirical material used for the analysis mainly focuses on the US and British experiences in Afghanistan, and more specifically the military practices that have been mostly associated with the discourse of the tactical trap: land patrols; conventional and special operation forces' (SOF) targeted missions on individuals, villages, and insurgent's camps; close air supports. While COIN legacies and practices vary between the US and British armed forces (Pritchard and Smith 2010; Dixon 2009), the practices presently analyzed were used in a similar way (excepted for special operations employed at a larger scale by the US). The emphasis on US and British forces is interesting in the analysis of the COIN tactical trap as they were heavily involved in military operations (specifically in the South and the East of Afghanistan).[5] I rely on "classical" open sources (newspaper articles, discourses, official reports), but also on memoirs published by militaries deployed in Afghanistan. As recent researches have shown, these materials are useful empirical tools for exploring the contemporary transformation of soldiers' masculine and combatant identities (Dyvik 2016a; Basham 2013) or popular geopolitics (Woodward and Jenkings 2012). As Synne Dyvik rightly puts it, "the usefulness of military memoirs as accounts of 'truth' must always be questioned" (Dyvik 2016a, 135). This is why this material needs to be treated not as a repository of truth *on war*, but as discursive productions through which soldiers (re)constitute their identities and the sense of their war experiences (Dyvik 2016b, 59; Wasinski 2019). Therefore, military memoirs provide an interesting access to the value and role attributed to violence by counterinsurgent actors in the campaign they were in charge of.

This paper is divided into four parts. First, I situate the analysis of the tactical trap in the larger understanding of population-centric wars. Through a critical constructivist lens, I conceptualize the tactical trap as an assemblage of violence that contingently orders the rationale of liberal COIN by futurizing the effects of the endless use of violence in Afghanistan. The second, third, and fourth parts are dedicated to the analysis of the respective components of the tactical trap assemblage:

- The lesser evil logic of land patrols,
- The dispersed proliferation of *killing zones,*
- The "low-intensity" air war.

By deconstructing the destructive specificities of these practices and of their role in the futurity making of population-centric war, the article shows that, as different as they can be, the varieties of violence are connected sites where a new ordering process of war is readable.

Order, chaos, and futurity: the assemblage of liberal COIN

The rehabilitation of counterinsurgency through the population-centric narrative in the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan comes from the claim made by the Western troops to assure the protection of populations (in the name of the national government) against the insurgency. The population is the centre of gravity of war: victory is achieved when the

population considers the interventionist political project as more legitimate than the insurgents' one (US Army 2006, 1–28). War moves from the systematic destruction of the insurgency in Vietnam (understood as the necessity for victory and radical modernization) to the exercise of force theoretically submitted to the comprehensive understanding of peoples' needs, fears, and allegiances (Owens 2015, 245). This logic was materialized in the "clear, hold and build" principle: once the insurgency's presence is reduced to a minimum in a part of the overall territory through combats (clearing phase), foreign troops needed to assure long-term security (holding phase) in order to make possible the development (building phase) of the conquered piece of territory (US Army 2006, 5–18; Ucko 2013).

In the Afghan campaign, these founding principles of liberal COIN were under a considerable strain. Strategic studies have convincingly pointed out the deficiencies of their practical application, such as the liberal illusion of spreading democracy through military occupation (Smith and Jones 2015), the incoherencies of the multinational effort and of the cooperation between the civil and military components (Rynning 2012), the preeminence of a military reading of the conflict and the related difficulty of thinking outside the dogma of combat (Kolenda 2019; Farrell 2017), as well as the impossible constructive relation between the Western powers and the corrupted local governments (Farrell and Chadhuri 2011). In this context, some strategic study scholars argue that the direct effect of such political-strategic difficulties was the fragmentation of the military action. Disconnected from strategic orientations (because of their lack of clarity), military action was condemned to endlessly repeat itself in order to compensate its temporary effects on the ground. In other words, the recent COIN campaigns were rather an ensemble of military tactic than the result of a broader strategy. This argument was already formulated for the Vietnam War (Krepinevich 1986, 164–168). It was nevertheless confined to the margins of the US strategic landscape. The representation of the Vietcong insurgency as a monolithic and centralized communist block stimulated the conventional strategic idea that enemy's willingness could be destroyed with superior firepower (Tyner 2009; Gibson 1988). Counterinsurgency as a set of tactics became a more credible critique in the Iraqi and Afghan contexts. The priority given to the protection of populations would have tended to fragmentize military measures up to the point that "tactical successes" (IED deactivation, raids on weapon caches, skirmishes during patrols) took the priority over the achievement of a grand-strategy, namely the political victory over the insurgency. Along other non-military means, the continuous use of force was an imperfect but necessary solution to maintain alive the overall project of stabilization in Afghanistan (Bolger 2015; Ledwidge 2011). This gap between what would be the reality of the battlefield and the ideal of COIN strategy is considered by some strategic thinkers as a "campaign disconnect" (Chaudhuri and Farrell 2011). As Gian Gentile argues:

> "But what is occurring now in Afghanistan, for example, at least for the American Army, is a "strategy of tactics." If strategy calls for nation-building as an operational method to achieve policy objectives, [...] then the population-centric approach might make sense. [...] The Army is so tactically oriented toward populationcentric counterinsurgency that it cannot think of doing anything else. [...] Yet in the new way of American war, tactics have buried strategy, and it precludes any options other than an endless and likely futile struggle to achieve the loyalty of populations" (2009, 7–16; see also Kilcullen 2006).

The thesis of the tactical-strategic gap gets also its popularity from accounts of analysts having directly observed US and British troops in Afghanistan. Accompanying the US Marines in the Helmand during the Surge, Bing West highlights on a critical tone the "disconnect" (2015, 116) between McChrystal's strategic wishes (qualified as an "impossible theory" (2015, 117)) and the crude reality of the battlefield, condemned to an endless use of force against the insurgency:

> ""Earn the support of the people and the war is won", McChrystal, the top commander, wrote" (West 2015, 116). "General McChrystal ordered our conventional units to spend only 5% of their effort killing the enemy. This convoyed the message that the conventional grunt was second-rate, not expected to strike fear into his enemies. [. . .]. Despite the fine-sounding rhetoric of the generals, 3rd Platoon and all the other grunts were engaged in a war of attrition. The hope was that our forces would kill so many Taliban, and their ranks could not be fully replenished, allowing the Afghan army to hold the remnants at bay" (West 2015, 209–210).

Political and strategic institutions are also directly involved in the identification of the tactical trap. When Stanley McChrystal took command of the Afghan war, he conducted a strategic review in which he pointed out this issue. Criticizing the conventional warfare model on which the ISAF campaign was based until 2009 when McChrystal took command of the mission, he recalled in his "tactical directive" the necessity to "avoid the trap of winning tactical victories – but suffering strategic defeats – by causing civilian casualties or excessive damage and thus alienating the people" (McChrystal 2009b). The definition of the tactical trap as a problem by institutions in charge of liberal counterinsurgency is a way of insisting on the necessity to make operations more political, rather than purely military. The tactical trap aims to reproduce the legitimacy of population-centric wars, as it starts from the problematic assumption according to which the tactical environment in population-centric wars would not reflect political-strategic orientations. The tactical trap is a functionalist view of military violence: the use of force is a more or less faithful representation of what would be a *correctly conducted* population-centric COIN. The tactical trap would be the deformation of a fully exploitable theory to the condition that the tactical milieu is functionally transformed in the right way (US Army 2009, ix). The tactical trap consists of an ideological separation between tactics and politics-strategy, in the sense that the "true" counterinsurgency is defined by its grand-intentions. It reproduces the ideological gesture that transforms combat realities into punctual "mistakes" and practices that can be "corrected." My intention is to show that the tactical trap is a discourse of power, materialized in violent military discourses and practices, which make possible the daily reinvention of population-centric war as a potential success.

To elaborate this argument, it is therefore interesting to take inspiration from the Critical War Studies, who suggest that the never-ending use of violence is not a dysfunction of population-centric COIN but its driving force. In contemporary COIN, war involves a programme of "spatially and temporally indeterminate pacification" of foreign states and populations (Kienscherf 2011, 530; Gregory 2010; Dillon and Reid 2009). In other words, indeterminacy governs the making of population-centric COIN, precisely because its foundations lie in the "therapeutic" (McFalls 2010) conception of military action that aims to permanently "cure" the global South from its chronic instability. In liberal COIN, the key traditional concepts of Western warfare, such as

victory, time, territoriality, or the enemy, are blurred. From this perspective, Caroline Croser's critique of the conventional strategic wisdom about the role of time in warfare is inspiring (2007). She argues that the "operational uncertainty" characterizing liberal COIN is not fully understandable if it is reduced to the classical conception of time, which conceives the conduct of war as punctuated by military actions supposed to produce a significant and calculable effect on the outcome of the conflict. In this view, the violence of liberal COIN can only be seen through the dysfunctional prism analyzed above, precisely because the indeterminacy of this violence escapes the traditional limits of time and calculation of military efficiency. This is why Croser argues that the indeterminacy of contemporary COIN cannot be simply conceptualized as a self-sufficient destructive dynamic that endangers the making of war. It constitutes a productive and transformative force that generates new ways in the political-military definition of failure and success in war:

> "In the context of traditional accounts of violence, violence is either fully commanded by agents, or it emerges through structures (such as geopolitical arrangements, the competition of resources, the clash of cultures). In either case however, violence is purposive – it has maintained it Clausewitzian sense of being politics pursued by other means. The temporality of such an account is linear and closed: violence is constrained, and if it exceeds the boundaries set by agents and structures, then there is no accounting for this excessiveness, except to say that this excessiveness is anarchical, destructive, or otherwise 'bad'. [...]. [W]e should view [...] violence not simply through the lens of its tendency to escape and destroy [...], but also through its tendency to produce and create. This tendency is shown through [...] the creative possibilities opened by destruction" (2007, 54).

In liberal COIN, as in the other risk-management wars, violence exceeds the traditional and rational controllability of violence, which has been "at the core of the so-called classical and modern [...] conception of war" (Wasinski 2011, 58; Bousquet 2008, 918–919). Nevertheless, it does not mean that the political-military aim to control and discipline organized violence has disappeared. The indeterminacy of present warfare precisely invites us to investigate the new ways in which violence is produced and framed as controllable. This theoretical position is an interesting starting point to explore the (violent) contested nature of defining a "success" in warfare, even more in the case of the tactical trap discourse, that contains in itself the institutionally recognized eventuality of failure. Indeed, seeing the tactical trap through the lens of the therapeutic indeterminacy structuring COIN incites to explore the contingency with which counterinsurgents daily reinvent their indefinite flow of coercion as a potential achievement, in spite of its stalemates or temporary effects. How to conceptualize this paradox that makes the radical indeterminacy (or uncertainty) of violence a functional element of population-centric wars?

As Barkawi and Brighton (2011) argue, the uncertainty of violence on the battlefield is not an abnormality, but the key ontological substrate on which the professionals of coercion work at legitimately shaping, ordering war, and defining the (dys)functionality of its violence. The contingency of fighting is the *sine qua non* test on which actors produce "truthful" rationalities about the war they are in charge of:

> "Fighting is that which thematically unifies war in general and in particular – "war" with "wars" – and no ontology of war can exclude it. Attention to fighting is that which marks out war-centered analysis from that reducing war to a secondary effect. Fighting and the

> violence of war exercise a profound grasp on the imagination, constituting the practical test to which strategic thought is oriented and the conventional mode for the achievement of victory. [...]. Fighting [...] also exceeds the terms of that immediacy. This "excess" is the capacity of organized violence to be more than kinetic exchange, to be constitutive and generative, to "cast into motion" subjects [...]. For us, this "excess", lying beyond the compelling, immanent socio-political logics of combatants, is at the core of the ontology of war" (2011, 135–136).

In this context, the argument I put forward is that the radical uncertainty of violence is not a pathology of population-centric COIN, but rather one of its condition of possibility. It structures and makes possible the subjectivities of soldiers, military planners, and political actors who precisely frame and elaborate the potentiality of success in war. In this context, I conceive the tactical trap as an *assemblage of violence*, made of heterogeneous coercive discourses and practices that build a bridge of *futurity* between the apparent dysfunctionality of the short-term coercive options and the strategic principles of liberal COIN. As Holmqvist and al. argue, "an assemblage is not a structure. While the latter implies a kind of formal, enduring, totality, an assemblage is a network in which relations between elements are never fully contained by a set formation" (2014, 4). Interpreting liberal COIN as a structure would tend to reproduce the interpretative pitfall that consists of seeing COIN as a pre-social, or reified coherent ensemble made of principles, rules, and political-military models that would be permanently disconnected from the reality of combat. On the contrary, interpreting COIN as an assemblage of violence sheds light on the non-linear, sometimes informal and, most importantly, futurized consistencies or relations between heterogeneous and apparently chaotic violent practices and the corresponding strategic orientations. The failure-progress nexus at the core of liberal COIN makes its existence both vulnerable and solid. This is why, following the words of Debbie Lisle, assemblage theory is a stimulating analytical basis to capture the political productivity of the indeterminacy of organized violence:

> "To make assemblage thinking relevant, we need to start with an acknowledgement of vulnerability, fragility and contingency – of the material world [...] and of the multiple [...] interactions that arise. [...] [T]hat vulnerability must be pursued with confidence that our critical ethos will create the space necessary to allow the assembled actors to articulate themselves in all their plurality, contradiction and particularity" (2014, 76).

As such, the tactical trap is not a structural disconnection between the pre-supposed non-functional materiality of violence and the world of politics-strategy. It is a specific and paradoxical *ordering* process that stabilizes, objectifies through a futurist narrative and in a highly contested and contingent violent way the "truthful" rationality of population-centric war.

Constantly patrolling by generating important volumes of fire or calling for aerial supports, temporary clearings of insurgents' camps and targeted killings, deactivating IEDs along the roads: by reflecting their own failures, those heterogeneous actions paradoxically assemble and maintain the shared horizon that Afghanistan *will be probably* secured (or subsequently "hold" and "built"). The counterinsurgency renewal is based on the contingent rationalization/reconstruction of its own permanent state of failures as a series of "successes," to such an extent that operations in Afghanistan were rarely commented in terms of "victory," but in terms of "progress." Afghan warfare did not even belong to the domain of a known, awaited political-strategic future. Its historical

moment remained confined in a "horizon of expectation" (Koselleck 2004, 255). Liberal COIN was a hypothetical, uncertain "future made present" (Koselleck 2004, 259). It was intrinsically unsecured in its potentiality but simultaneously secured through the instantaneity of military destructions, the probable result of their cumulative amount. The archipelagos of death creating by the tactical trap simultaneously order liberal COIN as a "politics of possibility" (Amoore 2013), an (un)secured political-strategic project. In other words, the reinvention of success in contemporary COIN is crystallized in a global and de-temporalized "necropolitics," that involves "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations" (Mbembe 2019, 68). As such, the tactical trap is not a dysfunction or a pathology of liberal COIN, but a key resource of power justifying the indefinite reproduction of its late-modern necropolitics. This is what the next sections are interesting in by analyzing the rationales of different practices commonly associated with the tactical trap of the Afghan warfare. I will start by deconstructing the conduct of land patrols.

The lesser evildoers in patrols

The daily life of conventional units deployed in the South and East of Afghanistan was mainly composed of patrols, launched from Patrol bases (PB) or Forward operation basis (FOBs). In conformity to the population-centric orientation of ISAF, patrols (conducted by foot or mechanised convoys) are meant to assure the control over the territory around the bases and the direct contact between military personnel and local populations. Patrols were a key tool to secure a zone in order to facilitate the implementation of reconstruction projects and public authorities.

Patrols often resulted in more or less intense and long unexpected combats and generated an even more important violence, given that units rarely managed to durably control the territories they crossed. Contingents went from patrols to patrols (so from fights to fights) without having the capacity to "hold" the area they were responsible for. Deployed around Marjah, a soldier explains the indefinite cycle of violence his unit was involved in: "Everything we did was showing our presence, making it at least look as if this was our territory and not the enemy's. It was as much a game of bluff as anything else, high-stakes brinkmanship, and we had to play" (Beattie 2009, 161). As such, the concept of patrols in Afghanistan was constructed on a (dys)functional territorial dilemma. Soldiers either chose to patrol to mark their presence by exposing themselves and local civilians to fights, ambushes, or IED explosions (Tupper 2011, 46–50); either (in order avoid these dangers to them and locals), they opted for punctual armed responses from FOBs and PBs when they were targeted by insurgents. In other words: movement and/or bunkerization.

In the first case, the strong presence of IEDs along roads and the small number of usable roads made the itinerary of units predictable for the insurgency. Patrolling in the Musa Qalah area, a British officer tells: "The Taliban knew we drove this read every day, and they knew at roughly what time we drove it. The threat from roadside bombs was high" (Lee 2012, 60, 120). Thus, patrols were founded on a psychological expectation that made the efficiency of this practice hard to evaluate. The aim was to "convince" the enemy of the tenacity with which allied forces indented to implant the political project they defended. The stabilizing effect of patrols was even more difficult to assess that

soldiers admitted that this tactic was less about "controlling" the crossed territory than "limiting" or temporary "forbidding" its access to the enemy (Bishop 2010, 143–144). Some patrols were the object of short-term skirmishes, but some evolved in longer and intense combats, more particularly when troops were taken in ambushes already planned and organized for a long-time by the insurgents. Exchanges of fire could last for entire mornings or afternoons before resulting in a calmer situation where troops could return to bases. Attacked during a patrol near Garmscir, a British officer tells his unit's response:

> "I gave each gunner a target area; an arc within which to contain their shooting.
>
> "Rapid fire!"
>
> The.50-cal and the three GPMPs [general-purpose machine gun] opened up in unison. The noise was phenomenal. So was the damage. The buildings started to disintegrate in front of our eyes; small, then much larger, holes began to appear in the walls, dust flew in the air, chunks of brick, stone and mud fell to the ground as the structure were eaten away. The return fire stopped but we kept shooting for another couple of minutes before I called a halt. 'Watch and shoot'" (Beattie 2008, 147).

In the second case of armed responses from military bases, it was mainly executed through indirect fires that consisted of immediate responses via artillery salvo and mortars dropped in the (approximate) direction of enemy's shot (Flynn 2012, 96–101, 107–110). Systematically besieged after they entered in Musa Qalah in 2006, British forces also developed a coercive tactic called the Manoeuvre Outreach Group (MOG) conducted by light infantry units: "The MOGs operated mainly in the desert, patrolling into the Forward Line of Enemy Troops to conduct 'shaping' operations and interdict insurgent reinforcements, thus relieving some of the pressure on the harried defenders of Musa Qalah" (Neville 2015, 23). While the MOGs were used to destroy enemy's attempts to attack allied bases, the pressure put on British forces was so high that they left the district centre of Musa Qala. Those types of measures and their temporary effects are the result of a bunkerization process making the US and British camps not only fortified and defended but also isolated and closed life spaces (Tomiak 2019). It contributed to an endless cycle of violence in a double interrelated way: by objectively/materially demarcating the "secured inside" of the camp and the "unsecured outside" of the territorial portion to control; by inter-subjectively creating among soldiers "a regimented life set behind walls" (Andersson and Weigand 2019, 516) that reproduced a perpetual feeling of the risk of being attacked. While liberal COIN postulates the necessity of dialogue with local populations, the fear of being targeted by insurgents melted into this same population (Tootal 2009, 41) paradoxically structured a "vicious cycle of distance and danger" (Andersson and Weigand 2015) between her and troops that maintained the possibility of violence inherent to bunkering.

In both situations (patrols or combats from bases), contingents maintained a perpetual state of violence. Patrols generated punctual, but repeated combats by drawing ambushes to units. In the second case, immobilism inside military bases let the opportunity to the insurgents to freely extend on the territory surrounding the troops and put them under pressure. As a consequence, territorial confinement or movement put contingents' actions in a "lesser evil logic" that involves "a pragmatic compromise [. . .] between [. . .] keeping violence at a low level enough to limit civilian [and troops]

suffering, and at a level high enough to bring a decisive end to war and bring peace" (Weizman 2011, 32–33). The humanitarian aspect of liberal COIN prescribing the excessive use of force, then troops were taken between the possibility of intense fights in patrols (exposing civilians or contingents to heavy destructions) and limited responses from bases. Such a dilemma transformed military violence into a self-sufficient dynamic reproducing the indefinite COIN logic of territorial (un)control. It was even more the case that combats which took place from bases were sometimes as intense as those happening during patrols (Junger 2010, 136–137), making the compromise behind the lesser evil logic significantly unstable in regards to the poor territorial control efficiency of the armed responses.

By extension, this dynamic was nourished by a permanent state of exception regarding the legal restrictions governing military actions in patrols, which was materialized by the development of lethal innovations. The lesser evil logic of humanitarian wars paradoxically encompasses the possibility of exception, precisely because "various types of destructive measure are weighed in a utilitarian fashion, not only in relation to the damage they produce, but to the harm they purportedly prevent" (Weizman 2011, 32; Delori 2017, 333). The case of snipers is relevant from this perspective. While they are classically deployed in operations to support the troops at distance, some British and American units took snipers in patrols. They were especially used to eliminate what militaries call the *dickers*. It designated unarmed men (sometimes children) who informed the insurgency of troops' location in order to improvise attacks. This preventive and illegal practice regarding ISAF's rules of engagements[6] became informally systematic with the exasperation of some units to be attacked without having the ability to localize the origin of the assault. Snipers killed *dickers* on the basis of more or less reliable signs (way of moving, "suspicious" use of radio or phones, etc.) in order to prevent as fast as possible the transmission of information (Harrisson 2015, 226–227; Cobain 2019). The physical elimination of *dickers* consisted of a calculated, limited, and unofficial exercise of force directed against specific individuals aiming to avoid the escalation of combat intensity during patrols. At the same time, it nevertheless participated to durably blur the legal distinction between civilians and combatants, and, by this way, structured the enlarged possibility of using violence through the practice of visual suspicion.

In this section, I argued that patrols are a key element in the indeterminacy of liberal COIN. The movement/bunkerization nexus produces a futurized conception of territorial control that stimulates the invention of lethal practices reproducing the very indeterminacy of population-centric war. The next section deals with another related aspect of the productive uncertainty of COIN: the *killing zones*.

Killing zones

The clearing phase of population-centric war in Afghanistan includes military actions meant to attack and suppress insurgents' camps, used by the insurgents as basis for training, combat, ambushes, and the production of IEDs. The camps were considered as key concentrations of enemies, and this is why their destructions were part of the direct military actions against the insurgency (Toy 2013, 112–128). Generally seen as one of the few spaces in Afghanistan deprived from civilian presence, camps were considered as

quasi-free fire zones, or more specifically what Laleh Khalili calls "death zones" (2013, 190), against which an important volume of firepower and damages could be inflicted (Beattie 2009, 81). The free-fire zones of the Vietnam War were shaped as vast and geographically delimited spaces where military force was durably used. Using corollary important coercive means (deforestation, displacements of populations in concentration camps – "strategic helmets") aiming to separate civilians from insurgents, "the army fired an unseen enemy with no particular target in mind" (Rabasa et al. 2007, 33; Gibson 1988, 135–136). While being historically rooted "in the black zones of Malaya, forbidden zones of Algeria, and the free-fire zones of Vietnam" (Khalili 2013, 188–189), death zones of liberal COIN, are not, on the contrary, delimited spatial terrains involving the excessive destruction of the natural environment and forced confinement of locals, but emerge as flexible and localized military responses to the fluctuation in the intensity of insurgents' activities.[7] After having destroyed two camps with his unit, a British soldier tells about their passage to the following site "808" (camps were called with numbers). The raids, combining ground and aerial firepower, aimed at temporarily "clean" the camp:

> "We had made our point. We had advanced on 808, and held it under attack. We had shown the Taliban we were prepared to take the fight to them, that we were able to move where we wanted, when we wanted. It would also keep them guessing, make them wonder what we would hit next. And it was also about numbers. We weren't going to wipe the enemy out, but every time we killed one of them we knock their resolve, put doubt in their minds, undermined morale just a little bit. Yet what we couldn't now do was keep 808 indefinitely. We would have to withdraw. But this time it would be on our terms" (Beattie 2009, 97).

The violence in free-fire zones of enemy-centric COIN was blindly used through and on an entire territorial portion. In the death zones of population-centric war, as the extract quoted above shows, military force is maximally deployed on selected entities, namely insurgents' compounds. In brief, death zones are contingently, openly declared and punctually attacked, as it was the case with insurgents' camps which were intensively under fire after being identified. The supposed absence of civilians made possible a paradoxical politics of localized but unbridled force giving the opportunity to use military violence in its more intense and destructive capacity against insurgents' ranks. Walls of insurgents' camps delimited the enclaves of death. In Afghanistan, camps were sometimes attacked one after another by NATO troops to demonstrate their ability to durably move and fight on the disputed piece of territory. Like patrols, compound raids were more about a show of force with temporary effects than a guarantee of a military occupation.

Raids on camps were not the exclusive prerogative of conventional units. This practice was close to different types of missions conducted by Special Operations Forces (SOF). They were progressively used (mainly in the context of the US led-coalition *Enduring Freedom*) for *Villages stability operations* (VSOs). Emerging in 2009 in the United States Special Operations Command, VSOs consisted of using SOF to stabilize rural villages by eliminating the presence of the insurgency or avoiding its establishment (Mills 2002, 1–2). Due to the coercive ethos characterizing SOF institutions, VSOs were executed through an important use of military power that did not vary that much from camp raids conducted by conventional forces. VSOs were especially carried out by Marines Special Forces in the North-West of Afghanistan, in Bala Murghab area. The objective was to

take control of two villages, Daneh Pasab and Qibcaq. The aim was less to "stabilize" Daneh Pasab and Qibcaq than to generate the most powerful destructions possible to annihilate the opposition populating the villages. The violence was all the more important that the secondary objectives of the operation were clearly kinetic: destroying an enemy centre of command; eliminating an insurgent regional leader and an individual responsible for setting up IEDs in the area. Between March and April 2010, Marines Special Forces executed large assaults over the two villages. Telling about one of the last attacks on Daneh Pasab, a Marine explains:

> "The Taliban force in Daneh Pasab had all been wiped out, and the few remaining fighters clambered together for protection somewhere near the Two-Story building, which was now nothing more than a massive crater of dirt bricks, small burning fires, and debris – they were trapped against the Murghab River with nowhere to go.
>
> They huddled together in fear, not wanting to move, not wanting to take the risk of being shot or vaporized by a bomb. [...] They only thing that waited from them outside their refuge [...] was death" (Golembsky 2016, 256–257). "This bomb landing on target represented the end of the Taliban's presence in Daneh Pasab. The remaining fighters were pinned down in a building, and the F-15 had a precision grid to it. The blast blew out all four walls and collapsed the roof, which was almost fully intact. The last remaining fighters were dead – either vaporized or crushed, or a little of both. [...] The village of Daneh Pasab has been cleared" (Golembsky 2016, 264–266).

VSOs were part of the "violent environmentality" (Anderson 2011, 224) defining liberal COIN, which means the transformation of the local socio-political milieu (the village) into a space dedicated to the practice of (population-centric) war. The village being one of the key human structures on which COIN must be exercised both in the name of fighting insurgents and persuading local populations (Owens 2015, 264–267; Khalili 2013, 61–62), then it became an entity integrated to the tactical trap discourse that contains the permanent exercise of force for winning hearts and minds. Therefore, constituting a "technolog[y] of ruination" (Belcher 2018, 99), VSOs participated in the same temporary effects of the violence that patrols or compound raids produced: in 2012, the insurgency came back in Bala Murghab, which means that "violence is redefined [...] as a creative rather than a destructive act that [...] become[s] part of the 'environment' of insurgent formation and may create more insurgents" (Anderson 2011, 222).

SOF were more systematically used for targeted killings. As part of the "Global War on Terror," post-9/11 COIN campaigns largely relied on targeting killings (Hunt 2010; Gilmore 2011). In Afghanistan, it became increasingly used with the intensification of combats after 2006 and was initially mainly reserved to "high-value targets" (individuals of strategic importance in insurgent networks). When McChrystal and Petraeus took successively command of allied forces in 2009 and 2011 in the context of the US *Surge*, the number of SOF targeted killings importantly rose and were progressively extended to "low/mid-value targets," such as drug dealers, mid-level commanders, IED makers, and, most importantly, insurgents responsible for attacks against patrols (Rynning 2012, 189). The extensive practice of SOF raids was part of a "molecular" type of war (Bousquet 2018, 192) in Afghanistan, dispersed through the proliferation of lethal, limited counter-offensives that aimed to contain, "impact on the INS [insurgents] ability to conduct punctual attacks against CF [coalition forces] [...] and the resupply of weapons" (ISAF-Task Force Helmand 2011).

Military actions like the reprisals against individuals responsible for attacks against troops in patrols show "the interminable horizon" (Bousquet 2018, 193) of the war molecularization inhabiting the extension of SOF targeting in Afghanistan: the least act of violence perpetuated by the insurgency contained the possibility of a programmed armed response. As such, conventional actions (such as patrols) and targeted killings mutually feed each other as part of the same cycle of infinite violence. As such, the tactical trap is animated by a coercive continuum of practices linking patrols, raids, and targeted operations. Repetitive patrols generating ambushes and attacks, then SOF were in charge of eliminating individuals involved in those actions. Targeted killings and patrols or camp raids are certainly different (visible operations of territorial control VS kinetic individualized actions), but the overall rationality in the use of force is similar: reducing the enemy's ability to conduct military actions, especially against coalition forces. While patrols and raids were conducted to temporarily weaken enemy forces, SOF raids followed a similar objective by eliminating individuals estimated as responsible for attacks against western troops and civilian casualties.

The corollary effect of the tactical trap assemblage, and more specifically in the SOF component, was the perception of the enemy as a pure material entity. Rather than being considered as a socio-political body, the insurgency was framed through its material ability or logistic. A soldier from the 75th Ranger Regiment deployed in the Pech Valley (Kunar province) explains as follows the aim of a targeted mission ("Operation Wolverine") he was involved in. The objective was to destruct the "Pech RPG Network," a group that organized attacks with rocket launchers on coalition forces:

> "The targets were Sayed Shah, Arghwan, Gul Jan, and Amin Khan. They were responsible for two U.S. troops killed in action (KIA) and eleven U.S. wounded in action (WIA) as numerous [...] RPG attacks on the U.S. military-named road MSR Rhode Island [...].
>
> Like Sayed Shah, Argwhan was also involved with RPG attacks against coalition forces. [...]
>
> The intelligence value of capturing Sayed Shah would degrade JDQ (Jamaat ul Dawa al Quran) and TB [Taliban] operational capabilities in the Korengal and Pech valleys of the Kunar province [...]"(McGarry 2016, 238–240).

The identity of the individuals invoked is fused with their armed *modus operandi*. They do not simply *use* RPGs, they *are* RPGs, "IEDs, RPKs, grenades, [...] and pistols" (Task Force 373 2009) and this is why the soldier precisely stipulates that the expected effect of the operation was to "degrade [their] operational capabilities." The enemy is a violent or technical event. SOF raids generalized the image of an "insurgency of things" (Grove 2016), against which what really mattered was the repeated destruction of the insurrectional logistics and technical means.

War at the village and directed against networks made stabilization a futurist present, an indefinite oncoming stage: it was never completely achieved, but rather in a constant progress. The accelerated rhythm of molecular SOF raids paradoxically appeared at the very moment when McChrystal and Petraeus took command of allied forces and intended to firmly implement the core principle of population-centric COIN, namely the political victory of over the insurgency by winning the hearts and minds of Afghan locals. The dispersion of armed force seemed to contradict the realization of the liberal COIN grand-narrative. It is, however, a paradox only in surface: the proliferation of targeted killings

only reproduced at a larger scale an already well-structured trend among ISAF forces: the conception of population-centric war as what it *will potentially be*, thanks to dispersed, limited but repeated and devastating military actions that created archipelagos of death. In the final section, I analyze the third component of the violent assemblage of COIN: air war.

"Low-intensity" air war

The technology of air power probably assured the biggest destructive part of the tactical trap assemblage, more specifically through the enlarged use of *close air supports* (CAS). It consists of air operations providing supports to contingents taken in combats. CAS is a relatively old practice. It was already used in the two world wars and during the Vietnam conflict. CAS were readapted to the context of recent counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. The abundance of fights caused by patrols, larger operations, and compound raids in Afghanistan resulted in a widespread use of CAS. Between 2006 and 2008 only, 29 769 close air support flights in Afghanistan were conducted (Human rights watch 2008). Taken separately, CAS actions are able to produce an important volume of fire and destruction. The extract below is a transcription by a British officer of the air support he called for during a patrol. With two requests addressed to the CAS coordinator, two raids of B-1 bombers dropped two waves of 2000 lb and 500 lb bombs (more than four tons of explosives). The British officer even compares those air interventions with the US carpet bombings of the Vietnam War:

> "'We are going to get a couple of 2,000lb bombs followed by a pair of 500s', said Sam [the CAS coordinator].
>
> [...] this was going to be a visitation from hell. [...]. With the B-1 there would be no warning. A mile or more high, it was barely visible, a black speck in a vast expanse of blue. The bombs would come out of nowhere. There would be no chance to react.
>
> The B-1 unleashed its firepower.
>
> I remember the strikes as if they were only yesterday.
>
> The first bomb I didn't see land, my head still buried in my charts. [...] I glanced up just in time to see dust, debries, trees, earth and I suppose people – or at least bits of them – start to fall back to earth. The second device exploded. The effect was the same. It was as if a whole section of the wood had been lifted up and deposited somewhere else. The sight was awesome. It reminded me of the old news footage I had seen from Vietnam, where the US pilots tried to carpet-bomb the Vietcong into submission. This was far short of what happened back in the 1960s', but it gave some insight into the sheer scale of destructive firepower available to us in Afghanistan.
>
> The firing from the enemy didn't just slow, it stopped completely. [...] Seconds later and there were more gigantic explosions in the same area as the two first two, sound rumbling out across the landscape" (Beattie 2008, 150–151; for Apache and AC-130 "Spectre" gunships Helicopters, see also:; Flynn 2012, 118–119).

All CAS were not so devastating (the B-1, AC-130 and Apaches have a specifically important destructive capacity), but militaries' accounts are full of references to this practice, via the use of heavy machine guns and bombs (generally weighing between 500 and 2000lb) from other aircraft like A-10, F-16 or F-18 (Wetzel 2015; Macy 2009a, 2009b;

Grahame 2011). The systematic call for CAS from land forces generated an even more important volume of fire than air supports mainly depended on the indefinite rhythm of patrols and raids that, as seen before, rarely achieved a durable control over the disputed areas. Progressively becoming a key element of military actions with their ability to deliver an incredible level of firepower in a short period of time, CAS were a central piece in the assemblage of short-term military successes that patrols, raids, and targeted killing missions maintained. While the massive and indiscriminate use of air bombings are no longer part of counterinsurgency, the use of CAS in the Afghan population-centric war reveals the existence of airpower practices exercising an important level of regular coercion, connected to the geographically limited other components of the tactical trap assemblage. First, the destructive capacity of CAS and aircraft was framed through a "technological fetishism" that celebrated the "cult of military machinery" (Wasinski 2019, 347). Locked into the self-referential world of the high technicality of airwar machines and material destruction, military perception of CAS transformed the adversary into "a series of geographical coordinates, [...] electronic dots" (Wasinski 2019, 347–348) to bomb. As a former British CAS coordinator explains:

> "I cleared the F-18 pilot to attack, and he released a GBU [Guided bomb unit]-38 airburst. The explosion ripped apart the air above the enemy position [...]. 'BDA [Battle Damage Assessment]: seven PAX [people] KIA [Killed in Action] in the treeline,' the pilot replied. [...] There were seven killed in action (KIA). [...] The enemy had been broken. There was no need for a follow-up attack" (Grahame 2011, 54; Wetzel 2015, 58–59).

This process of dehumanization/technicalization of the enemy irreducibly led, as similarly observed above with the weaponization of insurgents through SOF targeting, to the endless destruction of insurgency's logistics and members. Secondly, CAS keeps alive and re-actualizes the colonial COIN dreams of airpower as a police power tool able to exercise a permanent control and force over insurgents' activities (Neocleous 2013). The important level of firepower induced by CAS bombings nourished the renewed military belief that territorial control could be relatively achieved through a "perpetual low-intensity air war" (Hippler 2017, 341) bombing the material physicality of insurgency.

(Re)ordering war

The military personnel quoted is perfectly aware of the short-term effects of the violence he used in Afghanistan. This is a mere component of the tactical trap discourse presently analyzed: soldiers explain that their patrols, raids, targeted killings, or CAS will not decisively participate to establish the promised peace of population-centric COIN. Nevertheless, soldiers highlight more or less explicitly that their short-time violence, their ability to "win time," is the best participation they can offer to the Western project for Afghanistan. It does not mean that the population-centric dimension of COIN is totally absent from their violence: it merely works as a potentiality. *Afghan people will probably live a better life, but, in the meantime, force, sometimes in its more intense form, is a necessary reality*. The trap only exists if violence is conventionally thought in terms of immediate strategic efficiency. From a critical perspective nevertheless, my intention was to show that liberal COIN is not a dysfunctional "tacticalization" of war. The tactical trap exists only in discourses and violent practices that resolve its own tensions by elaborating

the futurity of strategy, namely the far away probability of peace. Population-centric war, its futurity, was an (un)secured political-strategic order. In the assembled futurity of military force, soldiers justify their violence through the argument of the accumulation of force: *at one time, the Western superior firepower would potentially make a relative difference*.

As such, Petraeus' "Anaconda strategy vs. Insurgents" and the destructive logic of his counterinsurgency guidance are not irreconcilable discourses. They are part of the same violent circle of "small massacres." "We're Not Going to Turn Afghanistan into Switzerland" is both an exaggerated metaphorical confession that the campaign has been a failure and a way to assume that firepower can help to "progress," or "exit" after nine years of war. Petraeus' plan for Afghanistan is a contradiction only if it is thought in terms of efficiency: paradoxically combing the US political lassitude and the reinforced population-centric narrative, his approach is the logical emanation and reproduction, at a more intense and aggressive stage, of the futurized assemblage of violence that maintained the intervention in Afghanistan alive until he took command. The evolution in the conduct of the Afghan campaign under McChrystal and Petraeus can be thought as a temporal one: what was before them managed as a horizon of expectation turned into a *horizon of impatience*.

The tactical trap is not a disconnection between the chaos of the battlefield and the ordered grand-narrative of COIN. The tactical trap connects the later and the former through an assemblage of violence that daily reinvents the eventuality of strategic success. The liberal transformation of COIN moved the use of military violence from indiscriminate and massive use of force to delimited, timely spaced, geographically diffused but systematic and repeated exercises of coercion. While the Vietnam War was a deluge of fire assumed as a strategy, the Afghan campaign shows the advent of a war-model based on non-linear but systematic deluges of fire. This logic reached its paroxysm after the 2009 US surge, the very time where the "real" population-centric COIN was supposed to be implemented. The increase of troops' presence and use of firepower generated an escalade of force, as soldiers had to fight the violence they contributed to feed. From February 2009 to May 2010, the number of IED explosions increased from 291 to more than 1128 (Cordesman et al. 2010, 26).

In this context, the present analysis is an invitation to re-consider the production of the functionality of violence in risk-management warfare. Its pathologies seem to be also the ingredients of the political-military production of "success." To further explore the rationality behind the prolonged conflicts currently structuring international security, it is therefore important to go beyond the used concept of "endless wars." It is too often used and thought in opposition to the mystified modern conception of warfare, in which violence is disciplined in terms of time, space, and cost-benefit assessment. The contemporary conduct of war can not be simply defined as pure excess, but as a combination of excess *and* order, of vulnerability *and* solidity. At a more fundamental level, the indeterminacy of violence should, therefore, be analyzed as it is: a new ordering process of war, based on the everyday invention of the potentiality of "progress."

This argument might finally help to investigate another key paradox in liberal COIN: the productivity of collateral damages in the normalization of violence. The violence supposedly used to protect the local populations from the insurgents (more specifically the patrols) is also (and paradoxically) responsible for the long-term destruction of civilian

lives (Dadkhah 2008; The Guardian 2011; Gebauer 2010; Herold 2008). Supposed to be chirurgical, SOF targeted killings, more specifically after their increase during the *Surge*, generated also significant civilian damages, sometimes in a very tragic way: during a raid closed to Gardez in February 2010, SOF operators accidentally killed two pregnant women and extracted the bullets in their dead bodies for avoiding prosecution (Scahill 2016). The report resulting from the Department of Defense internal investigation concluded that "the amount of force utilized was necessary, proportional and applied at appropriate time, [but that] tactical mistakes" were made." The tactical trap also contributed to normalize civilian losses by transforming them into "punctual incidents" or "unintentional actions" associated with the "tragic outcome of war" (Crawford 2013, 40).

Notes

1. The intervention in Afghanistan was formally composed of two main military blocks invested with different mandates (that progressively overlapped in practice): NATO's ISAF mission, focused on "stabilization" or "counterinsurgency", and the US-led coalition *Enduring Freedom* in charged of more kinetic "counter-terrorism" operations.
2. The population-centric narrative already structured the campaign before the strategic turn of 2009. It was nevertheless generally recognized that the operations were more military conventional than focused on the population as such.
3. Petraeus's approach for Afghanistan was inspired from his experience in Iraq, where he lead military forces in 2007–2008 with a plan similarly entitled "Anaconda Strategy versus Al Qaeda in Iraq". As this approach was elaborated in Iraq, a country governed by a modern state apparatus, it explains why the Afghan plan covers so many tasks.
4. Population-centric war is part of risk-management wars, as its objective is the stabilization of foreign areas to prevent the global spread of risks and dangers, as it was the case with terrorism in Afghanistan (Duffield 2007).
5. It was not the case of all national forces. Countries such as France (until 2008), Italy, or Spain preferred to deploy their forces in areas (like the North, the West and the capital zone) where combats where less important.
6. ISAF's ROEs stipulated that military force can only be used when troops are attacked or under an imminent physical threat.
7. Through the term "death zones", Khalili does not refer explicitly to Afghanistan. She uses this category in the context of Israel's military answer to the Second Intifada. In Gaza, Israel's military institutions "unofficially declared death zones [. . .], where anyone entering could be shot" (Khalili 2013, 190).

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