



The Valley's Edge: A Year with the Pashtuns in the Heartland of the Taliban

By Daniel R. Green

Potomac Books, 2012

288 pp. \$29.95

ISBN: 978-1-59797-694-7

Reviewed by

JOHN O'RYAN BULLOCK

As the war in Afghanistan nears completion of its 11th year, it is not uncommon to hear members of the Armed Forces describe America's long fight in the Hindu Kush as a series of 1-year deployments, cobbled together as units rotate in and out of the war zone with no real continuity or focus on a clear endstate. Such analysis is far more accurate than some may care to admit. As cynical as the comment may be, it gets to the heart of the reactive nature of the U.S. mission there and the challenges faced by the military as civilian policymakers slowly morphed the mission from counterterrorism, to nation-building, to counterinsurgency in an escalating war tragically overshadowed and undercut by events in Iraq (190).

The Valley's Edge is the autobiographical story of one of those deployments as seen through the eyes of a Department of State Political Advisor serving in the Uruzgan Provincial Reconstruction Team

(PRT) in southern Afghanistan in 2005 and 2006. Green's stint reflects the overall American experience in the country. PRTs are units focused on civil development and intended to assist the Afghan government in establishing basic infrastructure and services, as well as the necessary skill sets to care for a population battered by nearly 40 years of incessant warfare. Composed of personnel from various U.S. Government agencies and the military, these teams are among the most important units on the ground. They function in direct support of American and North Atlantic Treaty Organization objectives and are critical for building and sustaining effective governance. As a key member of the team—with the attending corruption, infighting, pitiful resources, and lack cultural intelligence and understanding he and the PRT faced on the ground—Green's story reflects the challenges faced by the United States and its allies in Afghanistan.

The author, currently a fellow at the Institute for Near East Policy in Washington, DC, has extensive experience in the war on terror including tours in Afghanistan and Iraq in both military and civilian capacities. This no doubt informs his central premise and stated purpose for writing: to highlight senior leadership failures which have undermined the sacrifice and faithful efforts of Americans on the ground trying to carry out national policy in Afghanistan (Epilogue).

Green's journey to Uruzgan Province began in the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, where he was working in the Office of the Secretary of Defense when Flight 93 struck the building. Like many Americans in the early days of the war on terror, he was driven to participate as meaningfully as he could. His commitment led him to the State Department and the Uruzgan PRT in Tarin Khowt, where he learned the realities of counterinsurgency warfare in a short time. His experiences are a microcosm of U.S. efforts to create a Western-style democracy among people traditionally resistant to central authority.

Green's work is at once a personal memoir and a war story. As such, it often highlights PRT activities in which he was personally involved including civil-military operations, psychological operations, the 2005 Afghan national elections, and other development and governance initiatives throughout Uruzgan Province. Yet there



NEW
from **NDU Press**

for the
Center for Technology and National Security Policy



Defense Horizons 76

Sharing to Succeed: Lessons from Open Information-sharing Projects in Afghanistan

By Linton Wells II, James Bosworth, John Crowley, and Rebecca Linder Blachly

Unless U.S. and coalition forces can share information with the populations they seek to influence in complex civil-military operations, they cannot achieve the goals for which they were committed. Information, communications, and related support structures influence all aspects of complex operations and need to be treated as critical infrastructures and essential services but rarely are.

Open information-sharing projects require sustained leadership interest plus shared and stable priorities among many parties. Absent this emphasis, the authors argue, changes in personnel, mission priorities, and funding levels will make it hard to develop, transition, and sustain any such effort. Observations from information-sharing projects in Afghanistan suggest several ways to change behaviors that can turn lessons observed thus far into lessons actually learned.



Visit the NDU Press Web site
for more information on publications
at ndupress.ndu.edu