

Afghanistan: The Continuing Challenge

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The Afghan War is not so much a forgotten war as much as it is a war that the U.S. has allowed to slip from apparent victory into serious crisis. To many the war seemed to be nearly over by 2002. The Taliban that had governed Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001 had had its leaders removed from power by the Northern Alliance and NATO forces when it refused to bring Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda to justice following the attacks of 9/11.

The U.S., Britain, Canada, and other NATO countries joined the Northern Alliance and began bombing the Taliban in early October 2001 and providing aid and special forces to support an offensive by the Northern Alliance. The Taliban government was forced to leave Kabul and Jalalabad by November and was driven out of Kandahar by December 2001—when it then dispersed to the countryside and Pakistan. U.S. forces continued to pursue Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, but could not stop them from relocating its operations to the tribal areas in the western frontier or Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan.

The Rebirth of the Taliban and the Rise of Insurgent Threats

As was the case in Iraq, a military victory against Taliban military forces was not followed by effective stability operations or credible plans for nation building. From 2002-2005, the U.S. and NATO treated Afghanistan as an exer-

cise in post conflict reconstruction that focused on creating and empowering an elected central government.

Northern Alliance forces were pressured to disband because they were controlled by warlords, yet only limited efforts were made to create an effective Afghan Army and national police. U.S. and NATO/ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) forces were kept at low “peacekeeping” levels that were incapable of securing the countryside. Security and aid efforts were divided into national zones, each of which was administered in very different ways with varying degrees of effort and levels of security. The only area where significant forces were deployed within the U.S. zone was in the east. Yet these forces were only strong enough to perform their mission if Pakistan had made significant efforts to secure its border.

The alliance did succeed in creating a democratically elected central government. The U.S. and its allies asked the UN to sponsor the Bonn Conference in 2001. This Conference established a process for political reconstruction that led to the adoption of a new constitution, a presidential election in 2004, and National Assembly elections in 2005. In December 2004, Hamid Karzai became the first democratically elected president of Afghanistan. An Afghan National Assembly was inaugurated in December 2005.

However, the manner in which the new government was created, which involved ambitious

goals for transforming the Afghan political system, justice system, and methods of governance into a modern state from the top down, did not hold the legislature significantly accountable at the local or provincial level. Only weak efforts were made to preserve and reconstruct the Afghan civil service, to provide adequate pay, and to both avoid and control corruption. Ethnic and sectarian rivalries were not effectively addressed, and the central government had only limited control and effectiveness in much of the country, particularly the Pashtun areas in the east and south of Afghanistan.

While outside countries provided major aid resources, this aid focused on medium- and long-term efforts to develop a modern state, rather than dealing with urgent needs. A fragmented combination of UN, NATO/ISAF, national, and NGO efforts took place with little coordination. A grossly inadequate effort was made to effectively administer this aid, establish effective financial controls, and ensure it would reach into the countryside. Worse, it was directed toward building a Western-style secular state with mid- and long-term goals, rather than reaching the ordinary Afghan and providing services in the countryside.

Counternarcotics efforts focused on eradication without creating adequate systems to avoid corruption and favoritism, and at a time when Afghan agriculture could not function because of the collapse of irrigation systems, drought, a lack of roads and transport to markets, population pressure on the land, and insecurity in rural areas. Afghanistan also lacked both the aid workers and Afghan staffs to credibly test and administrate programs to create alternative crops. These problems were compounded by a mix of sharecropping and loan programs that tied farmers to narco-traffickers, the growth of independent criminal networks, and corruption in a country where police and officials are paid token salaries.ⁱ

The U.S. also gave clear priority to the Iraq War. Work by Amy Belasco of the Congressional Research Service shows that the total budget authority for the Afghan War totaled \$171.1 bil-

lion for expenditures over eight fiscal years (counting the FY2009 bridge funds as part of FY2008) versus \$653.1 billion for six fiscal years of the Iraq War.ⁱⁱ Accordingly, expenditures have been 3.8 times higher on Iraq. Total cost, however, is only part of the story.

The U.S. made the same fundamental mistakes in both wars. It entered both without any plan to conduct meaningful stability operations, to take on nation-building tasks, and to fight a major insurgency. This grand strategic failure occurred despite warnings from many experts in the military, State Department, intelligence community, and outside experts. This failure was a major contributing factor in U.S. and allied casualties in both wars as well as to the length, total cost, civilian casualties, collateral damage, and opportunity costs of both wars.

There was, however, a fundamental difference in the way that the Bush Administration reacted to the challenges it faced after the initial moment of conventional victory. The U.S. reacted almost immediately by making massive expenditures on forces and economic aid in Iraq. Total funding rose from \$53.0 billion in FY2003 to \$75.9 billion in FY2004, to \$85.5 billion in FY2006, \$133.6 billion in FY2007, and \$149.2 billion in FY2008. These figures radically differ in comparison to the case of Afghanistan. The U.S. effectively failed to resource its efforts against an increasingly serious insurgency as it developed from FY2002 through FY2006. The U.S. never committed anything even approaching the aid resources necessary to support a “win, hold, build” strategy. This was in spite of the fact that Afghanistan—unlike Iraq—did not have substantial funds left over from the previous regime or a major ongoing stream of income from oil exports. At no point in the history of the Afghan war has the U.S. made a major aid commitment like it did in FY2004 in Iraq, when it committed \$19.5 billion in funds for foreign aid and diplomatic operations.

Moreover, the U.S. wasted two critical years—FY2001 and FY2002—by providing only token funds for foreign aid and diplomatic operations

(\$800 million in FY2001 and FY2002). Given the fact that a start-up aid program takes at least a year to begin to be effective, often takes 14-18 months to go from authorization to a start-up on the ground, and then takes months to years to complete, this was a major failure. The Administration never seemed to realize that it needed to take the initiative to shape the broad politico-military battlefield, and dominate the situation before the Taliban-HiG-Haqqani-al Qa'ida could react. For all the U.S. talk of shaping the decision making cycle, it has been the U.S. that has reacted to enemy gains and actions since 2002.

The net effect created a power vacuum that allowed the Taliban to regroup inside the border areas of Pakistan and provided Al Qa'ida a virtual sanctuary in the FATA area. The traditional Taliban reasserted itself in the southern Afghan-Pakistan border area, or Baluchistan, under the leadership of Mullah Mohammed Omar. Other Taliban elements emerged along the eastern Afghan-Pakistan border and FATA. These were areas that had remained loyal to Omar but were under growing influence from Al Qa'ida and other groups. Taliban forces were given better military training and equipment, and other Islamist elements joined them.

These include forces under Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who had fought the Soviets as well as many other Afghan rival movements, and who rejected the formation of the Karzai government. Hekmatyar leads a group of Islamic extremist insurgents called the Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddinor (HIG) based in the FATA area and active in eastern Afghanistan. The other major additional faction is led by Mawlawi Jalaluddin Haqqani, who is sometimes credited with introducing suicide bombing to Afghanistan. Haqqani served as a Taliban military commander north of Kabul, and was responsible for Taliban operations in 2001 as well as the ethnic cleansing of local Tajik populations. He has also established bases in the FATA, and is reported to have helped create a local group in Pakistan that has sometimes been called the Islamic Emirate of Waziristan

and has several thousand Pakistani fighters. Hekmatyar and Haqqani are officially loyal to Omar and the Taliban.

U.S. intelligence officers believe that Hekmatyar and Haqqani often cooperate with the Taliban, but that there is no formal hierarchy or chain of command that binds them together. They also feel that the Taliban groups in the FATA area, while being loyal to Omar, evolved in ways that allowed them operate in an increasingly independent manner and thus to be far quicker in adopting new tactics.

The U.S. and NATO/ISAF were slow to react to these shifts, and initially focused largely on the outcome of military clashes—which were sporadic and which the U.S.-NATO/ISAF forces always won. They were slow to realize that the Taliban was steadily increasing its influence in the Pashtun areas in the countryside and was instead focusing on winning the battle for political influence and control. The U.S.-NATO/ISAF forces were far too small to control the countryside and Afghan forces were only effective where they had strong outside support—which was only possible for the larger U.S. forces in Eastern Afghanistan.

At the same time, the corruption, incompetence, and inaction of the Afghan government left large areas outside the control of "Kabulstan." The aid process tended to be localized where small NATO/ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) were co-located with NATO/ISAF forces. Only a fraction of the aid (estimates of 10-14%) reached the countryside, where 70% of Afghans live, and the flow of aid was so corrupt and poorly managed that some Afghan officials estimate that only 40% went to actual program activity inside the country. U.S. and other aid workers often did have significant success in areas such as providing roads, electricity, and water—as well as schools and medical services—but these achievements occurred only in the relatively limited areas where aid workers and resources were allocated.

These conditions created a vacuum that the insurgents were quick to exploit, which was

compounded by years of drought in much of the countryside and an economy that increasingly relied on corruption, extortion, crime, as well as growing and selling narcotics. The counter-narcotics effort was executed in ways that encouraged corruption and buying Afghan officials and security officers off. It also pushed narcotics cultivation into southern Afghanistan and the areas influenced and controlled by the Taliban. The counter-narcotics effort failed to provide effective alternatives to drug cultivation. At the same time, the lack of central government services, development, and an effective rule of law opened up much of the country to criminal activity and to the *de facto* return of local warlords. The limited legitimacy of elected officials was often lost at the provincial and district level by the failure of these officials to provide effective governance.

The problem was not that the Taliban, Hekmatyar, and Haqqani grew so strong, but that the opposition remained so weak. This allowed the war to grow from a low-level insurgency to a serious regional conflict between 2004 and 2009. In the process, the war broadened to include Pakistan, and became closely tied to the broader struggle against Al Qa'ida. It also became a war that the U.S. is now losing, along with the Afghan government and NATO/ISAF. The U.S. and its allies may win virtually every major military tactical engagement, but they are losing the real struggle: a political war of attrition.

Winning the Battles and Losing a War of Political Attrition

NATO still defeats the Taliban and other insurgent movements in virtually every clash, although it relies heavily on airpower to substitute for its lack of ground troops. Many of the national contingents do little more than defend their own bases. The International Council on Security and Development (formerly the Senlis Council) reports, however, that the

“Taliban now holds a permanent presence in 72% of Afghanistan, up from 54% a year

ago. Taliban forces have advanced from their southern heartlands, where they are now the *de facto* governing power in a number of towns and villages, to Afghanistan's western and north-western provinces, as well as provinces north of Kabul. Within a year, the Taliban's permanent presence in the country has increased by a startling 18%. Three out of the four main highways into Kabul are now compromised by Taliban activity. The capital city has plummeted to minimum levels of control, with the Taliban and other criminal elements infiltrating the city at will.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The increase in their geographic spread illustrates that the Taliban's political, military and economic strategies are now more successful than the West's in Afghanistan. Confident in their expansion beyond the rural south, the Taliban is at the gates of the capital and infiltrating the city at will. Of the four doors leading out of Kabul, three are now compromised by Taliban activity. The roads to the west, towards the Afghan National Ring Road through Wardak to Kandahar, have become unsafe for Afghan or international travel by the time travelers reach the entrance to Wardak province, which is about thirty minutes from the city limits.

The road south to Logar is no longer safe for Afghan or international travel. The road east to Jalalabad is not safe for Afghan or international travel once travelers reach the Sarobi Junction which is about an hour outside of the city. Of the two roads leaving the city to the north only one—the road towards the Panjshir valley, Salang tunnel and Mazar—is considered safe for Afghan and international travel. The second road towards the north that leads to the Bagram Air Base is frequently used by foreign and military convoys and subject to insurgent attacks.

By blocking the doors to the city in this way, the Taliban insurgents are closing a noose around the city and establishing bases close to the city from which to launch attacks inside it. Using these bases, the Taliban and insurgent attacks in Kabul have increased dramatically—

including kidnapping of Afghans and foreigners, various bomb attacks and assassinations. This dynamic has created a fertile environment for criminal activity. The links between the Taliban and criminals are increasing and the lines between the various violent actors becoming blurred. All of these Taliban successes are forcing the Afghan government and the West to the negotiating table.

The Taliban are now dictating terms in Afghanistan, both politically and militarily. At the national level, talk of reconciliation and power sharing between undefined moderate elements of the Taliban movement and elected government officials is commonplace. At a local level, the Taliban is maneuvering skillfully to fill the governance void, frequently offering a mellow version of localized leadership than characterized their last stint in power.

U.S. and NATO reporting are more optimistic—although largely because they focus on military incidents and not on the growth of insurgent control and influence. Leaks of U.S. and UN intelligence maps do show, however, that high-risk areas inside Afghanistan have increased by 50% every year since 2005. Bombings, IED (improvised explosive devices) attacks, suicide attacks, the number and intensity of tactical clashes, cross border incidents and infiltration, attacks in Kabul, and other metrics of violence have been sharply on the rise since 2004, and have increased by at least 30% in 2008.

The UN rates nearly half the country as unsafe for movement by aid workers not supported by troops, and security has deteriorated sharply in Kabul, particularly in the last year. The level of violence, incidents, and casualties continues to rise, as does the frequency and intensity of combat. A new threat has also developed to U.S. and NATO/ISAF lines of supply, as well as imports from Pakistan, during 2008. This is critical because at least 60% of all supplies come from ports in Pakistan across the border in the Khyber and FATA areas.

While maps that show the growth of Taliban, Hekmatyar, and Haqqani areas of influence are

classified, it is clear from unclassified briefings that these insurgent groups continue to expand their influence at the local level. At the same time, the Afghan government remains absent or ineffective in much of the country, most foreign aid has no practical impact on the security and stability of threatened areas, and the combination of U.S., NATO/ISAF, and Afghan security forces is far too small to secure the countryside. Refugee problems and poverty are made worse by the problem of both personal and organized crime. While narcotics output is down—largely because of a saturated market and dropping street price as well as drought issues—it remains a key part of the national economy and a force behind both crime and corruption.

These problems are compounded by the situation in Pakistan. Little unclassified or reliable data is available on the expansion of Islamist extremist influence and control in the FATA (tribal areas) along the Afghan-Pakistan border in the east, but it is clear that this region has become the center of Al Qa'ida operations. Furthermore it seems apparent that near sanctuaries exist for two increasingly independent centers of Taliban activity as well as the Hekmatyar and Haqqani movements.

Baluchistan has become a near sanctuary for the classic Taliban movement under Sheik Omar. Cross border operations and infiltration continue to grow, U.S. and Afghan lines of supply through Pakistan are coming under increasing threat, and Pakistan faces an ongoing political and domestic economic crisis. In addition Pakistan also faces threats from a variety of ethnic and sectarian groups, its own domestic Taliban and a range of Islamic extremist and terrorist movements—some of which have pushed it towards a confrontation with India.

Not a Forgotten War But a Hidden One

The seriousness of this situation is partly disguised by the fact that the U.S. government, allied governments, NATO/ISAF, and the UN do not provide meaningful reporting on the nature of the fighting, the growth of the insur-

gency, or the successes and failures of the Afghan government and outside aid efforts. None of the reporting and major indicators used in government releases on the Iraq War have been made available in unclassified form on the Afghan War, although some data has been leaked.

It is clear, however, that the draft National Intelligence Estimate on Afghanistan—that was effectively complete in October 2008—described the situation in crisis terms and saw 2009 as a critical year. The same is said to be true of the strategy exercise headed by Major General Douglas Lute, former Director of Operations of Centcom in the NSC, although no details have yet been released of its content. Secretary Gates, Admiral Mullen, and the U.S. and NATO theater commanders have all issued such warnings in broad terms. The same is true of General Jim Jones, the new NSC advisor, in his reporting on the war to the Council on Foreign Relations, “Make no mistake. NATO is not winning in Afghanistan.”

Meeting the Immediate Challenge in Afghanistan

The combination of insurgent forces remains relatively weak in military terms. It is unlikely that there are more than 30,000 full-time fighters, and some experts put the numbers at between 10,000-20,000. While it is increasingly dependent on airpower to make up for its lack of ground strength, NATO is able to win virtually every tactical clash, and no insurgent group has held a major town or city.

While polls show a trend in favor of the Taliban and striking differences by district, the Taliban and other movements are still unpopular in most of Afghanistan. Much of their influence comes from a lack of any Afghan government presence or activity. This commonly occurs as a result of the fact that U.S. and NATO/ISAF forces cannot secure the countryside, and because aid is not effective, or the Afghan government provides no meaningful services and/or is deeply corrupt.

Nevertheless, the U.S. faces an immediate challenge to find ways to reverse the course of the fighting in Afghanistan, and bring high-risk areas—and areas of Taliban influence—under control. It also must deal with the immediate threat posed by the Taliban, Haqqani, Hekmatyar, and Al Qa’ida in Pakistan, and guard against any form of spoiler operation by Iran.

The NATO/ISAF Challenge

These problems are compounded by the fact that the U.S. must deal with an awkward and divided command chain in NATO, which consists of three, three-star officers and often conflicting national caveats and command chains, and a U.S. command chain that presents serious problems. In December 2008, NATO/ISAF also consisted of 51,350 personnel. A total of 31,400 were allied, and they were a mix of allied forces from some 41 countries that are unlikely to make major reinforcements. They also are divided into “combat”—UK (8,745), Poland (1,130), Denmark (700), Canada (2,750), Netherlands (1,770), etc.—and largely “stand aside” forces—France (2,785), Germany (3,600), Italy (2,350), etc.”

This already has led U.S. commanders to talk about increasing the U.S. presence in Afghanistan of some 34,000 men and women by 20,000-35,000 more troops. It also led to the announcement of plans to nearly double the size of the Afghan Army, to try to reshape a failed police training effort, and to the consideration of creating new local militias.

The Afghan Forces Challenge

Until recently, the development of Afghan security forces has been a badly managed, grossly understaffed, and poorly funded mess. Although the Taliban forces were defeated in 2001, the U.S. did not seriously fund Afghan forces development until 2007. While there are different ways to total the figures, no serious funding came until 2005. Total U.S. security funding then leapt from \$2.4 billion to \$7.8 billion in FY 2007, only to drop to \$1.8 billion in

2008 and \$2.3 billion in 2009. Spending these funds involved substantial delays in disbursement and further worsened the problem.^v

Changing goals in terms of force levels, role and mission also presented a serious problem. In late 2008 the Afghan government, NATO/ISAF, and the U.S. increased its force goals for the ANA (Afghan National Army) from 70,000 to 134,000 men in an effort to give it much needed end strength. These goals were set, however at a time when the ANA had only 30-40% of the U.S. and NATO/ISAF trainers and embeds it required, and many of these trainers had little or no real qualifications or competence. There were far too few partner units in the field, and Afghan units were often committed to combat without adequate levels of support.

The near doubling of the force means that such assets are now even more inadequate. Equipment for the ANA is also limited, and efforts to give it sustainability remain uncertain. The ANA is still being trained largely in terms of battalion-equivalents, rather than as an integrated army, and the Afghan Air Force is only beginning to be revived as an active force. ANA units are relatively capable, but even after five years, no ANA unit has gained the Capability Monitoring 1, or CMI, status indicating it is rated as having the ability to operate independently without substantial support by U.S. or NATO/ISAF forces.

It also has led to U.S. strategy studies that examine plans to use the same “clear, hold, build” in high-threat districts that the U.S. used with some success in Iraq. These plans would seek to integrate military operations with aid in governance, development, and employment at the local level. They would shift from the top down, central government approach to security and aid used since 2002 to an approach that also built up security and development at the town, district, and provincial level.

It should be noted, however, that the lead times involved ensure that it can take months to more than a year to fully fund, deploy and exe-

cute such plans; that most cannot be executed during the winter campaign season; and that large-scale action may only be taken towards the end of the major summer campaign season in 2009. It is also far from clear if U.S. plans to strengthen the U.S. military forces in Afghanistan are matched by credible options to increase the flow of aid where it is needed and to provide the mix of military and civilian U.S. aid workers and trainers.

As for the Afghan police, serious questions exist as to whether the trainers and resources are available to create both an effective ANA and ANP at the same time. Moreover, the goals set for shaping the ANP continue to change and still seem more suitable to post-conflict construction than to active war fighting. A December 2008 report by the Crisis Group notes that authorized manning levels continue to rise, and that some 149,000 men are reported to have been trained, yet that actual manning only seems to range from 35,000 to 57,000:^{vi}

The Economic Aid Challenge

These military problems have also been worsened by a deeply divided and corrupt economic aid effort that continues to set unrealistic goals based on peacetime priorities. Furthermore the UN, NGOs, as well as the U.S. and its allies have failed to properly staff, protect, and administer the aid effort with any effectiveness. Since 2001, the U.S. has provided approximately \$32 billion in humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan.^{vii} In addition, the international community has provided a further \$25.3 billion.

There are many broad conceptual aid plans. The U.S. set vague goals in the Afghan Freedom Act in 2002. In January of 2006, 64 countries and 11 international organizations attended the London Conference on Afghanistan and approved the Afghanistan Compact which focused on three pillars: Security, Governance (Rule of Law and Human Rights), and Economic and Social Development. The most recent addition to the Afghanistan Compact is the Afghanistan

National Development Strategy which was signed by President Hamid Karzai on April 21, 2008. It contains another broad set of strategies for improvements in security, governance, economic growth, as well as poverty reduction based on both the UN's Millennium Development Goals and the Afghanistan Compact. It presents goals to be accomplished in the years 2008-2013.^{viii}

There are, however, no detailed plans, accounting systems, or meaningful measures of effectiveness for these efforts even eight years after their start. Some of these accounting and management problems may be corrected by the creation of a Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) in 2008, but the Congress did not fully fund the office and it will not be fully operational and able to begin its work until the fall of 2009.^{ix}

The Afghan Political Challenge

These challenges will be compounded by the fact that Hamid Karzai must run for reelection in October 2009, and there will be an election for the popular part of the National Assembly, which consists of the Wolesi Jirga or House of People (no more than 249 seats), in September 2009.^x A political campaign followed by major shifts in many positions in government will take place in the middle of a critical military campaign year, a year of global economic crisis, major problems with food supplies and food prices, as well as growing refugee inflows to both Afghan cities and population centers.

Furthermore, President Karzai is negotiating with elements of the Taliban and has been reported to have expressed a desire to meet with Hekmatyar and Haqqani to try to find ways to include "moderate elements" in the government and/or to split such movements and create local ceasefires and alliances. These types of political arrangements have failed in both Afghanistan and Pakistan in the past, and have effectively allowed extremist elements to dominate the areas where ceasefires and agreements took place. They have worked in other counterinsurgency campaigns, but almost always

where the government was already decisively winning, the insurgency was severely threatened, movements had already split, hard-line ideologues were at least partially isolated, and the government had offered credible incentives. These conditions do not yet exist in either Afghanistan or Pakistan.

Meeting the Immediate Challenge in Pakistan

The situation in Pakistan is even more complex. This is especially significant because the strategic center of gravity in the war may have shifted from Afghanistan to Pakistan. Regardless of Pakistani public statements, both public opinion polls and the private statements of Pakistani officers and officials show that much of Pakistan sees the Afghan War as a largely American War that is destabilizing Pakistan. It is also clear that Pakistan has other interests that it sees as having higher strategic priority.

The Pakistani government must deal with serious internal political problems, including a low-level insurgent movement in Baluchistan, a range of Islamic extremist and terrorist movements, a Taliban movement in the Swat valley, and Lashkar-e-Taiba (literally Army of the Good) in Kashmir and other parts of Pakistan—a movement whose attacks in Mumbai have created a new crisis in Pakistani relations with India.

Both the Pakistani military and Pakistani intelligence have Islamist elements—some with ties to Al Qa'ida, the Taliban, Haqqani, and Hekmatyar. While this is particularly true of elements of the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), it also affects police intelligence and local intelligence services, which came heavily under the control of the military-directed ISI when Musharaf was in power.

The Pakistani government has never fully controlled the FATA areas, and military-led governments have previously attempted to exploit Pashtun Islamist movements in both the FATA and Afghanistan to maintain influence and gain control over the area. There has been little meaningful Pakistani government security

effort in Baluchistan other than that directed at preserving the security of the region's gas production and shipments. There also is little evidence that Pakistan has used U.S. military and economic aid effectively in either the FATA or Baluchistan.^{xi}

Pakistan also now faces a growing economic crisis, and serious challenges in restoring civil democratic control over the country and both the nation's military and security forces. Corruption is endemic, the police are both corrupt and heavily influenced by American forces. The intelligence and security forces have been penetrated by Islamist elements with ties to the Taliban and Islamist extremist elements.

The U.S. has sought to use political pressure, as well as both economic and military aid to make the Pakistani government take action against Al Qaeda, the Taliban, Haqqani, and Hekmatyar, but has only had sporadic success. Most of the aid it has provided has either disappeared into the pockets of a corrupt leadership and military, or has been used to improve Pakistan's warfighting capabilities against India.

The U.S. has also made repeated efforts to pressure the Pakistani government into deploying security forces into the border areas, and to conduct operations against Al Qaeda, the Taliban, Hekmatyar, and Haqqani groups. It has had limited success, but Pakistani forces have not conducted a steady or systematic effort. The local security forces have been largely ineffective, and the Pakistani Army has often performed badly in counterinsurgency warfare. These problems have been compounded by the lack of meaningful Pakistani governance and aid activity.

The U.S. and Pakistan have a "Strategic Partnership," which senior officials reasserted during a regular session of the U.S.-Pakistan strategic dialog in September 2008. In practice, Pakistan has opposed U.S. military operations against any threat of force operating on Pakistani soil, and this opposition has strong political, military, and public support. It has tolerated and sometimes tacitly supported low-

level and covert U.S. operations against key targets, but largely in the form of unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs).

The U.S. has offered to have special forces provide the training in counterinsurgency they need to meet the threats in FATA, has worked with the Pakistanis on improving border security, has developed tools for Afghan-Pakistani cooperation, and has worked with Pakistan to expand joint covert operations and the use of UCAVs. It is unclear at this point, however, how far such cooperation will go.

The Longer Term Challenge: "Where Does It End?"

The U.S. must reverse the course of events in Afghanistan during 2009 and 2010 to even have a mid- and long-term to worry about. The very term "post-conflict reconstruction" is now a grim, if not farcical, Orwellian oxymoron. The immediate issue is warfighting—although this is at least as much a matter of "hold"—in the sense of providing constant day-to-day local security—and "build"—in the sense of providing jobs, a livelihood, government services, a rule of law and material hope for the future—as it is "clear" or "win" and producing more tactical victories. It also is establishing the proper balance of "clear, hold, and win" in the most critical and threatened population districts and rural areas—not creating development at the national level.

It is vital, however, to ask the same question about the Afghan-Pakistan War that General David Petraeus asked about Iraq: "Where does it end?" It is clear that U.S. vital interests are centered around defeating the broader threat of international terrorism, not around the future of Afghanistan—which is at best a strategic sideshow of little more than humanitarian interest in every other way. The central issue of the war is Al Qaeda and any of its spin offs or affiliates, and the center of gravity for Al Qaeda—to the extent it has one center—is now Pakistan. Taliban control of Afghanistan would only be threatening to vital U.S. interests to the

point that the Taliban movement either became a source of international terrorism or gave Al Qaeda an even better sanctuary than Pakistan does.

NATO and Pakistan are far more serious strategic interests than Afghanistan. Talking about Afghanistan as *the* test of NATO ignores the reality that Europe and Atlantic security are vital strategic interests, that they play a critical role in dealing with Russia and the Middle East. NATO should not be judged by the willingness of allied states to project large forces into a war that the U.S. let escalate from peacemaking to insurgency through its own mismanagement. Talking about pressuring or invading Pakistan to save Afghanistan misses the point that alienating and possibly radicalizing a nuclear armed-Pakistan would have an impact on vital U.S. strategic interests as well as create an even better potential sanctuary for Al Qaeda.

These are not reasons, per se, to abandon Afghanistan. They are reasons to demand that any U.S. strategy combine the Afghanistan conflict with a strategy for Pakistan. This strategy must be directly linked to clear goals and plans which show it can deprive Al Qaeda and international terrorist movements of a *de facto* sanctuary. U.S. strategy must also ensure that it does not overextend itself into Central Asia where it may best achieve its strategic interests by not becoming involved in a new form of the "Great Game" that Britain and Russia played during their struggle for control of Central Asia in the 19th Century. There also are reasons to avoid blaming our NATO allies for not fighting our war in the way we now want, having ourselves made the mistakes that have created the current level of conflict, and to remember that NATO is NATO and not some new Central Asian alliance.

The U.S. may be able to meet these criteria by shifting its strategic focus to working with Pakistan, particularly if it offers partnership and carrots rather than threats and sticks. This is a high-risk option. Pakistan's internal problems are too great for the U.S. to offer easy answers, or to hope that economic and military aid can

shift the Pakistani government's priorities, and win Pakistani military and popular support with high confidence.

Nevertheless, a hostile Pakistan, a truly unstable Pakistan, and/or an Al Qaeda sanctuary are such serious risks that the U.S. must try. However, the question of "how does it end" in Pakistan truly matters. The Biden-Lugar aid program that authorizes \$7.5 billion in aid over 5 years that can be used for development purposes, such as building schools, roads and clinics would be one such tool if it can be effectively and honestly administered in what are effectively combat or high-risk zones by a government with a long history of both favoritism and corruption. The bill also calls for greater accountability on security assistance, to improve Pakistani counterterrorism capabilities and to ensure more effective efforts against the Taliban and Al Qaeda.^{xiii}

In Afghanistan, the U.S. needs to be far more realistic about what it can and cannot do. As is the case in Iraq, the U.S. may well be able to combine a limited surge in forces with the build-up of Afghan security forces and a shift to a local "clear, hold, build" strategy to defeat the Taliban-Hekmatyar-Haqqani inside most of Afghanistan. However, the current longer-term goals the U.S., its allies, and the UN have set for Afghanistan may be no more realistic or achievable than the goals the U.S. once set for a model democratic Iraq than would transform the Middle East.

Economic development may well have to be limited to meeting the most urgent Afghan needs over a 5-10 year period. The CIA summarizes the situation as follows, "Afghanistan is extremely poor, landlocked, and highly dependent on foreign aid, agriculture, and trade with neighboring countries. Much of the population continues to suffer from shortages of housing, clean water, electricity, medical care, and jobs. Criminality, insecurity, and the Afghan Government's inability to extend rule of law to all parts of the country pose challenges to future economic growth."^{xiii} This situation can only be changed by major shifts in outside aid

efforts that first meet immediate needs for roads, water, and power. This aid must be honestly and effectively administered to infrastructure and more advanced forms of development in ways that have the transparency, accountability, and measures of effectiveness currently lacking in virtually all aid efforts.

If such aid is forthcoming, it will probably take the remainder of the decade as well as continuing donor aid and attention to significantly raise Afghanistan's living standards from its current level—among the lowest in the world. International pledges made by more than 60 countries and international financial institutions at the Berlin Donors Conference for Afghan reconstruction in March 2004 reached \$8.9 billion for 2004-09. While the international community remains committed to Afghanistan's development, pledging over \$24 billion at three donors' conferences since 2002, Kabul will need to overcome a number of challenges such as budget sustainability, job creation, corruption, government capacity, and rebuilding war torn infrastructure.

It almost certainly will be impossible to totally halt the narcotics trade, which the CIA estimates generates roughly \$4 billion in illicit economic activity and looms as one of Kabul's most serious policy concerns. Even if elements of the Taliban and other extremists are not brought into the Afghan government as a result of negotiations, political development will probably leave the country deeply fractured on regional, ethnic, and sectarian lines. There will be large

elements of "Islamic" and tribal conservatism in both politics and the law as well as significant compromises with the more "moderate" Islamist extremists.

Human rights and the rule of law may take a decade longer or more to evolve than was planned at the Bonn Conference. Drugs and corruption may continue to endure at least at moderate levels in Afghanistan (as they do in the U.S. and Europe). Moreover, achieving these goals cannot be done on the quick or on the cheap. They will almost certainly require a major U.S. security and military/economic aid commitment for the next decade.

Finally, the U.S. must examine the possibility that it cannot achieve these goals in the face of numerous obstacles. It may be that only Afghanistan and Pakistan can now solve these problems on their own. It is also possible that these problems are simply not possible to fix. One should not exaggerate the strength of Al Qa'ida—or the Taliban-Hekmatyar-Haqqani insurgency. There is no immediate reason for pessimism if the U.S. is willing to make the shifts in strategy and the commitments necessary to give it a good chance to win. But limited wars do not always end well. The U.S. needs to approach the Afghan-Pakistan conflict with a ruthless degree of realism in analyzing both its progress and options. Finally, it must consider that it may be forced into a strategy of containment from outside both Afghanistan and Pakistan in the future.

Figure 1
Afghanistan vs. Iraq: The Basic Challenges – Part I

Category	Afghanistan	Iraq
Area in Square Kilometers	647,500	437,072
Border length	5,529	3,650
Pakistan	2,430	-
China	76	-
Tajikistan	1,206	-
Turkmenistan	744	-
Uzbekistan	137	-
Iran	936	1,458
Kuwait	-	240
Saudi Arabia	-	814
Syria	-	605
Jordan	-	181
Turkey	-	352
Maximum Elevation	7,485	3,607
Land Use		
Arable land:	12.13%	13.12%
Permanent crops:	0.21%	0.61%
Other:	87.66%	86.27%
Irrigated land: (sq. km)	27,200	35,250
Total renewable water resources: (cu km)	65	96.4
Population:	32,738,376	28,221,180
Age structure:		
0-14 years:	44.6%	39.2%
15-64 years:	53%	57.9%
65 years and over:	2.4%	23%
Median age (years):	17.6	20.2
Life expectancy at birth (years)	44.2	69.6
Ethnic divisions:		
Pashtun	42%	-
Tajik	27%	-
Hazara	9%	-
Uzbek	9%	-
Aimak	4%	-
Turkmen	3%	-
Baloch	2%	-
Arab	-	75-80%
Kurd	-	15-20%
other	4%	5%

Sectarian Divisions:

Sunni Muslim	80%,	32-37%
Shi'a Muslim	19%,	60-65%
other	1%	3%

Linguistic Divisions (no percentage data for Iraq, largely Arabic and Kurdish))

Afghan Persian or Dari (official)	50%	-
Pashto (official)	35%	-
Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen)	11%	-

Figure 2

Afghanistan vs. Iraq: The Basic Challenges – Part II

Category	Afghanistan	Iraq
30 minor languages (primarily Balochi and Pashai)	4%	-
Literacy		
Total	28.1%	74.1%
Male	43.1%	84.1%
Female	12.6%	64.2%
Economy		
GDP (purchasing power parity): \$USB (2007)	35	103.3
GDP (official exchange rate): \$USB	8.8	55.44
GDP - per capita (PPP):	1,000	3,600
GDP - composition by sector:		
agriculture:	38%	5%
industry:	24%	68%
services:	38%	27%
note: data exclude opium production (2005 est.)		
Labor force (Million)	15	7.4
by occupation:		
agriculture:	80%	-
industry:	10%	-
services:	10%	-
Unemployment rate:	40-53%	40%
Population below poverty line:	53%	NA
Budget: (\$US Billion)		
revenues:	0.715	43.2
expenditures:	2.6	48.4
Comparative Economic Metrics		
Electricity – production in million kWh	754.2	33,530
Electricity – consumption in million kWh	801.4	35,840
Oil – production in bbl/day	0	2,110,000
Oil – consumption in bbl/day	5,000	295,000
Exports in \$US billion (less opium)	0.274	38.11
Imports in US billion	3.823	24.81
Debt –External in \$US billions	8.0	100.9
Airports	46	110
With paved runways over 2,400 meters	6	58
Roadways (km)		
Total	34,782	45,550
Paved	8,229	38,339
Unpaved	26,553	7,151
Railways (km)	0	2,272

Note: Many data are estimated from past years, or highly uncertain.

Source: CIA, World Factbook, 2008, electronic edition, updated 4 September, 2008

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/>

References

- i UN reporting is more optimistic (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Afghan Opium Survey 2008, August 2008, p. vii.), although it ignores much of the tie between drugs and the Taliban, and the fact that crop output dropped in large part because of over saturation of the international market and a drastic fall in farm gate prices as a result, "This year, the historic high-watermark of 193,000 hectares of opium cultivated in 2007 has dropped by 19% to 157,000 hectares. Opium production declined by only 6% to 7,700 tons: not as dramatic a drop as cultivation because of greater yields (a record 48.8 kg/ha against 42.5kg in 2007). Eradication was ineffective in terms of results (only 5,480 ha and about one quarter of last year's amount), but very costly in terms of human lives.

...Since last year, the number of opium-free provinces has increased by almost 50%: from 13 to 18. This means that no opium is grown in more than half of the country's 34 provinces. Indeed, 98% of all of Afghanistan's opium is grown in just seven provinces in the south-west (Hilmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Farah, Nimroz, and to a lesser extent Daykundi and Zabul), where there are permanent Taliban settlements, and where organized crime groups profit from the instability. This geographical overlap between regions of opium and zones of insurgency shows the inextricable link between drugs and conflict. Since drugs and insurgency are caused by, and effect, each other, they need to be dealt with at the same time – and urgently.

The most glaring example is Hilmand province, in the south, where 103,000 ha of opium were cultivated this year – two thirds of all opium in Afghanistan. If Hilmand were a country, it would once again be the world's biggest producer of illicit drugs. By contrast, Nangarhar, Afghanistan's second highest opium producing province in 2007, has become poppy free. This is a remarkable accomplishment, the first time it happens in the country's modern history.

...Success in 2008 can be attributed to two factors: good local leadership and bad weather. First, strong leadership by some governors, for example in Badakshan, Balkh and Nangarhar, discouraged farmers from planting opium through campaigns against its cultivation, effective peer pressure and the promotion of rural development. They deserve tangible recognition. Religious leaders, elders and shura also deserve credit for becoming increasingly effective in convincing farmers not to grow opium, not least because it is against Islam.

Second, drought contributed to crop failure, particularly in the north and north-west where most cultivation is rain-fed. The same drastic weather conditions also hurt other crops, like wheat, increasing significantly its domestic price. This, combined with the global impact of rising food prices, is creating a food crisis. Yet, higher farm-gate wheat prices (because of shortages), and lower farm-gate opium prices (because of excess supply) have significantly improved the terms of trade of food: this may provide further incentive to shift crops away from drugs.

- ii Amy Belasco, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11," Congressional Research Service, RL33110, Updated July 14, 2008, pp. 16 and 19.
- iii See International Council on Security and development, *Struggle For Kabul: The Taliban Advance*, December 2008, pp. 3-5
- iv Source NATO/ISAF. Current as of December 1, 2008.
- v Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. October 2008, pp. 12, 25-27.
- vi Crisis, Group, "Policing in Afghanistan: Still Searching for a Strategy, Asia Briefing No. 85, December 18, 2008, pp. 2-3.
- vii Estimates differ. These figures come from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), <http://www.sigar.mil/>.
- viii For a detailed description of these plans and US aid spending, see Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. October 2008.
- ix PL 110-181 authorized a \$20 million drawdown from the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) for the standup of SIGAR during 2008. However, these funds were never disbursed to SIGAR. Actual appropriations from the Supplemental approved on June 30, 2008 resulted in \$2 million being available through September 2008, with an additional \$5 million made available on October 1, 2008. Congress subsequently appropriated \$9 million from the Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act of 2009, which was signed by the President on September 30, 2008. With these funds, hiring has begun and conditions set for resourcing SIGAR's long-term personnel, facilities, and logistics requirements

x The popular election is directly elected for five-year term. The Meshrano Jirga or House of Elders (102 seats) has a mixed composition: one-third elected from provincial councils for four-year terms, one-third elected from local district councils for three-year terms, and one-third nominated by the president for five-year terms.

xi Reporting on how bad the situation is controversial. Pakistani military claim sometimes describe valid military actions and other times seem to be little more than propaganda. There is no outside validation. As for aid, the State Department, Department of Defense, and AID do not provide meaningful accounting or measures of effectiveness. Press reporting (Declan Walsh, "Pakistani military 'misspent up to 70% of American aid.'" The Guardian, February 28 2008) is almost certainly correct in stating that as much as 70% of \$5.4bn in assistance to the country has been misspent. Since 2002 the US had for Pakistan's military operations in the tribal belt along the Afghan border, and for food, fuel, ammunition and maintenance. The cash payments averaged \$80m a month but American officials processing the payments at the US embassy in Islamabad are reported to have concluded that Pakistani expense claims have been vastly inflated, and only 30% of the money reimbursed paid for legitimate costs actually expended. Receipts are not provided to support the claims, and the money is paid directly into the finance ministry.

xii The key provisions of the bill (<http://lugar.senate.gov/record.cfm?id=300696>) are:

1. Authorizes \$7.5 billion over the next 5 fiscal years (\$1.5 billion annually) in non-military aid. Advocates an additional \$7.5 billion over the subsequent 5 years

2. Conditions military aid on certification by Secretary of State that Pakistani security forces are:

- making concerted efforts to prevent al Qa'ida and associated terrorist groups from operating in the territory of Pakistan;

- making concerted efforts to prevent the Taliban from using the territory of Pakistan as a sanctuary from which to launch attacks within Afghanistan; and not

materially interfering in the political or judicial processes of Pakistan.

3. Urges a reorientation of engagement towards the Pakistani people rather than merely towards the Pakistani government (civilian or military).

4. Urges accountability and transparent reporting of Coalition Support Funds.

5. Directs the Secretary of State (in consultation with other named officials) to develop a comprehensive strategy for the Afghan-Pakistan border area.

The explanation of the accountability provisions affect all aspects of the aid programs to Pakistan and Afghanistan, "Currently, the U.S. supplies about \$1 billion annually in CSF to Pakistan. These funds are regarded by the Bush Administration and the Pakistani government as "repayment" rather than "aid." In fact, the accounting and transparency of this program makes a true reckoning impossible: How much of the \$6 billion we've spent on CSF so far has actually gone to its intended purpose (compensation for actual expenses incurred in combating Al Qa'ida and the Taliban)? How much has been used for the normal operating expenses of the Pakistani military? How much has simply been redirected to purposes of little or no benefit to the U.S.? The bill urges transparent accounting and tightened Congressional oversight."

xiii Like most wartime economies that have major Western military spending and aid support, Afghanistan has had a high growth rate measures in purchasing power parity terms, but has had wretched income distribution and most of the money flows out of the country. The CIA reports a \$35 billion GDP for 2007 in ppp terms but only \$8.842 billion in market terms. Similarly the per capita income was \$1,000 in ppp terms but only around \$250 in market terms and these figures ignore income distribution and capital outflows. Some 14% of aid as of mid-02008 had gone to agriculture, which accounted for 38% of the GDP (excluding opium production) but 80% of the labor force. The Afghan budget in 2008 was based on \$715 million in revenues and \$2.6 billion in expenditures (expenses equaled 360% of income).