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## NATO and the new US “Af-Pak” Strategy

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*“From our partners and NATO allies, we seek not simply troops, but rather clearly defined capabilities: supporting the Afghan elections, training Afghan Security Forces, and a greater civilian commitment to the Afghan people.”*

President Barack Obama, March 27, 2009<sup>2</sup>

### “We can do better”

In a *Washington Post* Op-Ed on January 18, 2009, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer—then NATO Secretary General—wrote:

...an honest assessment of Afghanistan must conclude that we are not where we might have hoped to be by now. While the country’s north and west are largely at peace and improving, the south and east are riven by insurgency, drugs and ineffective government. Afghans are increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress in building up their country. And the populations in countries that have contributed troops to the NATO-led mission are wondering how long this operation must last—and how many young men and women we will lose carrying it out.<sup>3</sup>

Operations in Afghanistan pose a strategic challenge for NATO, not only because it is the largest and longest duration combat operation in the history of the Alliance, but also because of the fissures that the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has exposed among NATO members. These differences include questions on how to characterize and approach the violence in Afghanistan and the relative military contributions by member states to the first and thus far only operation conducted by NATO under Article V. Allegations that some members have not been carrying their fair share of the burden have raised the specter of a “two-tier” alliance<sup>4</sup>.



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<sup>2</sup> Barack Obama, “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan,” March 27, 2009. Available at: [http://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2009/03/obama\\_new\\_strategy\\_afghanistan.html](http://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2009/03/obama_new_strategy_afghanistan.html)

<sup>3</sup> “Afghanistan: We Can Do Better,” <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/16/AR2009011603717.html>.

<sup>4</sup> See Timo Noetzel and Benjamin Schreer, “Does a multi-tier NATO matter? The Atlantic Alliance and the Process of Strategic Change” *International Affairs* 85: 2, 2009 at: [www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/13550\\_85\\_2noetzel\\_schreer.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/13550_85_2noetzel_schreer.pdf)



The election of a new US president provided the opportunity to reevaluate and revise efforts in Afghanistan and the region. The Obama administration seized this opportunity and published a new strategy for Afghanistan-Pakistan on March 27, 2009. The following is an analysis of what is frequently called the “Af-Pak Strategy,” and its implications for NATO and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission.<sup>5</sup> Because the role of NATO in the Pakistan portion of the strategy is extremely limited, this paper focuses on the elements directed toward achieving success in Afghanistan. Evidence is drawn purely from open-source materials. The primary sources are three key documents: the White House press release on what’s new in the strategy, President Obama’s remarks announcing the strategy, and an interagency white paper that was released simultaneously. These are complemented by published interviews with and newspaper quotes from key individuals such as Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, the US envoy to the region, and General David Petraeus, the commanding general of US Central Command and head of the American combatant command responsible for US military efforts in Afghanistan.

Analyzing the strategy is complicated by fact that its development and implementation will be an interdependent and evolutionary process. Although the official description of the Af-Pak strategy and related statements by the White House will be unlikely to change, at least within the next year or two, the next logical step in the process of implementing the strategy is for the entities responsible for executing the strategy to write subordinate plans.<sup>6</sup> According to press reports, the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)/ISAF commander, General Stanley McChrystal, recently completed a new “60-day Assessment” of the situation in Afghanistan that US Secretary Defense Robert Gates had tasked him to write.<sup>7</sup> This process will probably result in significant changes to the Joint Campaign Plan developed by General Chrystal’s predecessor, General David McKiernan. However, because of military secrecy requirements it is likely that this process will be mostly opaque.

Eight years of military and political intervention since the US initiated combat operations in October 2001 have obviously had a major influence on the operating environment in Afghanistan (as well as the neighboring situation in Pakistan). As should have been expected, al Qaeda, the Taliban and other extremist groups have continually adjusted their tactics in response to the actions of the US, NATO, and Afghanistan’s

elected government. And, US and other NATO forces in Afghanistan have experienced a long series of incremental changes in policy, strategy, and plans not only in response to the evolving situation in Afghanistan but also due to Alliance and domestic political considerations. It would be naïve, if not negligent, to believe that any new strategy will produce a quick success that would put an end to the action-reaction cycle and obviate the need for future adjustments.

### Continuity + change: the new strategy in US context

In order to understand and appraise the Obama administration’s strategy, it is necessary to place it in the context of the situation inherited from the Bush administration.<sup>8</sup> This will be useful to provide an appreciation of how we arrived at the current juncture, and also in deriving lessons from what has been attempted in the past and proven effective and should be emulated, or what was futile and should be avoided. The myopic thinking that has often characterized US strategy and planning for Afghanistan (and Iraq) has been counterproductive not only by inhibiting sufficient investment and long-range planning, but also because military officers and civilian officials on relatively short tours tend to look neither far into the future to establish long-range goals nor into the past to examine what their predecessors have done. It may be a cliché to say that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, but this truism is nonetheless a good one.

This is worrisome given the tone of Obama administration pronouncements and media accounts that greatly exaggerate the newness and innovation displayed by the Obama Af-Pak strategy. For example, in the July/August 2009 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Fotini Christia and Michael Semple begin their article breathlessly with the assertion: “After seven years of the Bush administration’s neglect and mismanagement of Afghanistan, President Barack Obama was prompt in ordering the deployment of 21,000 more U.S. troops.”<sup>9</sup>

The frequent Bush administration strategy reviews, numerous evolutions in policy, and the creeping but multiple increases in troop strength and funding may say something about the level of foresight and quality of management but seem to belie the accusation of neglect. More importantly,

<sup>5</sup> For example, see Kimberly Kagan, “Why the Taliban Are Winning—for Now,” *ForeignPolicy.com*, August 10, 2009: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/08/10/why\\_the\\_taliban\\_are\\_winning\\_for\\_now](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/08/10/why_the_taliban_are_winning_for_now)

<sup>6</sup> The Obama administration’s envoy to the region, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, provided a discussion of his plan for implementing some of the diplomatic elements of the strategy during a forum hosted by the Center for American Progress in Washington, DC on August 12, 2009. See “U.S. Policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan: Ambassador Holbrooke and His Interagency Team,” notes by the Project on Middle East Democracy, <http://www.pomed.org>

<sup>7</sup> Peter Spiegel, “Commander Maps New Course in Afghan War,” *Wall Street Journal* June 12, 2009: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124476295460908195.html>

<sup>8</sup> For a broader historical view, see Mark A. Burroughs, “A Historical Case Study of U.S. Strategy Towards Afghanistan,” U.S. Army War College, April 2009. Available at: <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA499080>

<sup>9</sup> “Flipping the Taliban: How to Win in Afghanistan,” pp. 34-45. Alternatively, in his blog on the *Foreign Policy* web site, David Rothkopf has written that a compliant media and Obama’s star power “...has enabled the administration to take inherited policies and wrap them in Obama-paper with Obama-glitter all over it and all of a sudden, the old was repackaged into appearing new.” See: [http://rothkopf.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/07/08/the\\_problem\\_when\\_the\\_president\\_is\\_the\\_policy](http://rothkopf.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/07/08/the_problem_when_the_president_is_the_policy)



Christia and Semple fail to mention that the troop increase implemented a recommendation developed by the Bush administration as part of a 2008 strategy review but put on hold in deference to the incoming president.<sup>10</sup> The Bush administration's strategy review and recommendations to send more troops meant the Obama team did not have to start from scratch and prompted Pentagon planners to begin preparations for the troop increase should it be approved. Yet if Bush had made the formal decision to commit the additional forces as a lame duck, there surely would have been complaints about him handcuffing his successor.

As described in further detail below, the bulk of the "new" strategy is a continuation of Bush administration plans and policies. This should beg the question: if they didn't work for George W. Bush, why should they work for Barack H. Obama? Optimistic but plausible explanations include: the Bush strategies were solid but their execution was poor, inadequate resources were devoted to carrying out otherwise sensible policies and plans, and/or necessary adjustments were made far too slowly and thus ceded the initiative to the enemy. Nonetheless, analysts should not mislead themselves into believing that the inauguration of a new Commander-in-Chief who is far more articulate and popular than his predecessor will alone suffice as the change necessary to turn the situation in Afghanistan around. Although it is now unpopular to quote former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the war in Afghanistan will continue to be a "long, hard slog" for quite some time to come.<sup>11</sup>

## The Bush administration's legacy

One characteristic of the new administration's approach that is significantly different from its predecessor is that the Af-Pak strategy has been described in publicly released documents that present a largely coherent, integrated concept for US and allied efforts in Afghanistan (and Pakistan). Such was not the case for the Bush administration's efforts in the region. As Catherine Dale has written, "As of the start of 2009, the U.S. Government had not yet published a formal strategy for Afghanistan, along the lines of the November 2005 *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*."<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless, while they not as comprehensive and complete as the 2005 strategy for Iraq, discernible outlines of the Bush

administration's approach to Afghanistan are indeed publicly available. An increasing amount of information was released by the Bush administration over time—probably coinciding with the administration's evolution in thinking about the problem combined with recognition of the declining security situation—and provided an increasing degree of lucidity.

### *Initial Minimalism with a Military Focus*

According to Douglas Feith, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy at the time, the Bush administration had determined that in 2001 its "task in Afghanistan was to overthrow the Taliban regime and deny al Qaeda its safe haven."<sup>13</sup> Feith summarized the initial campaign strategy for Afghanistan as:

- Aiming to oust the Taliban regime (not just to hit al Qaeda)
- Committing U.S. ground forces
- Using the indirect approach of supporting Afghan militias
- Relying on precision strikes
- Maintaining a small U.S. footprint to avoid problems that the Soviets (and British) had had in Afghanistan<sup>14</sup>

Feith also wrote that the strategy subsequently shifted: "In 2002, it was to help the Afghan interim administration establish its authority."<sup>15</sup>

### *Adding Elements of Economic Development and Building Afghan Forces*

Although the Bush administration had initially opposed the idea of nation building, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld continued to be skeptical,<sup>16</sup> on April 17, 2002 President Bush gave a speech that many interpreted as proposing a "Marshall Plan" for Afghanistan:

Peace – peace will be achieved by helping Afghanistan develop its own stable government.  
Peace will be achieved by helping Afghanistan train and develop its own national army.  
And peace will be achieved through an education system for boys and girls, which works.  
We're working hard in Afghanistan. We're clearing minefields. We're rebuilding roads. We're improving medical care. And we will work to help Afghanistan to develop an economy that can feed its people without feeding the world's demand for drugs.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See Karen DeYoung, "Afghan Conflict Will Be Reviewed: Obama Sees Troops As Buying Time, Not Turning Tide," *The Washington Post* January 13, 2009, p. A-1. Available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/12/AR2009011203492.html> (accessed July 7, 2009). Also, see Barbara Star, "Obama approves Afghanistan troop increase," CNN.com February 17, 2009, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/02/17/obama.troops/index.html> (accessed July 7, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> See Dave Moniz and Tom Squitieri, "After grim Rumsfeld memo, White House supports him," *USA Today* October 22, 2003: [http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2003-10-22-defense-memo-usat\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2003-10-22-defense-memo-usat_x.htm)

<sup>12</sup> Dale, *ibid*, p.9.

<sup>13</sup> *War and Decision* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), p. 139.

<sup>14</sup> Feith, *ibid*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>15</sup> Feith, *ibid*, p. 139.

<sup>16</sup> For example, in remarks at the Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum in New York City on February 14, 2003 he said: "Afghanistan belongs to the Afghans. The objective is not to engage in what some people call nationbuilding [sic]." ("Beyond Nation Building," transcript at: <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=337> (accessed July 7, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Speech at Virginia Military Institute. Transcript available at: [http://www.usembassy.it/viewer/article.asp?article=file2002\\_04/alia/A2041813.htm](http://www.usembassy.it/viewer/article.asp?article=file2002_04/alia/A2041813.htm) (accessed July 8, 2009).



Yet no detailed reconstruction plan was published by the White House and the rudimentary elements of a nascent strategy to help provide security, economic development, good governance, and build Afghanistan's army were substantially under-resourced. According to David Rohde and David E. Sanger: "Sixteen months after the president's 2002 speech, the United States Agency for International Development, the government's main foreign development arm, had seven full-time staffers and 35 full-time contract staff members in Afghanistan....Sixty-one agency positions were vacant."<sup>18</sup>

In a *New Yorker* magazine article, Seymour Hersh—who is extremely critical of the Bush administration's efforts in Afghanistan—depicts contemporary and former US government officials describing an action-reaction cycle as the Taliban adjusted tactics in response to the initial US approach of "reliance on massive firepower." According to then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Collins, the Taliban "began to realize at the end of 2003 that the key is not to fight our soldiers but U.N. officials and aid workers."<sup>19</sup> This realization initiated a shift in the administration's approach and the devotion of additional resources.

### **Increased Funding**

Around the same time, according to Collins, "significant money began to flow" to support Afghan reconstruction and security efforts. Apparently, this was due to a shift in US strategy. Hersh writes that "In January of 2003, Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, made a fifteen-hour visit to Kabul and announced, 'We're clearly moving into a different phase, where our priority in Afghanistan is increasingly going to be stability and reconstruction.'" Hersh also reports that the Bush administration planned to devote additional efforts to "improving security and rebuilding the Afghan National Army."

In November 2003, Zalmay Khalilzad, an Afghan-American with strong political connections to the Bush administration, was appointed as the new US ambassador to Afghanistan. Besides direct access to the top levels of the US government, he was provided a budget (\$2 billion) for reconstruction and other civilian efforts that was twice the size of the previous year's allocation. In partnership with the US military commander for Afghanistan, Lieutenant General David Barno, Khalilzad began implementing a new plan called

"accelerating success" that included the expansion of Provincial Reconstruction Teams to "build schools, roads, and wells and to win the 'hearts and minds' of Afghans."<sup>20</sup>

### **Recognizing Pakistan's Influence on the Situation**

The Bush administration also began linking conditions in Pakistan with success in Afghanistan. President Bush met with Pakistan's President General Pervez Musharraf in Islamabad in early March 2006 to confer about cooperation in the "war on terror" immediately after meeting with Afghan President Hamid Karzai in Kabul.<sup>21</sup> Bush met simultaneously with Musharraf and Karzai at the White House on September 26, 2006 to discuss common efforts to fight terrorism. At this occasion Bush praised the two leaders for "working hard together to defeat the Taliban and al Qaeda."<sup>22</sup>

### **More Troops, More Money, More Training**

Following a trip to Afghanistan, on December 14, 2006 Anthony Cordesman wrote that "The Bush Administration is already considering major increases in military and economic aid and limited increases in US forces."<sup>23</sup> Cordesman reported that in order to produce the desired endstate of a "Moderate, stable, representative Afghanistan," a major part of US strategy was development of the Afghan National Army (ANA).<sup>24</sup> He described three "lines of operation" in this respect:

- Establish and Enhance ANA Training Command
- Professional/Self Sustaining Afghan National Army (Main Effort)
- Sustainment Operations for Afghan National Army

Cordesman's report included briefing slides illustrating that the above efforts were supporting four other lines of effort as part of a "Clear, Hold, Build, Engage" strategy:

- Security
  - Credible Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF)
  - ANSF and Coalition Forces defeat elements of Al Qaeda, Taliban, and other Extremist Groups
  - Afghan led
  - Coherent Campaign Plan

<sup>18</sup> David Rohde and David E. Sanger, "How a 'Good War' in Afghanistan Went Bad." *The New York Times*, August 12, 2007. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/12/world/asia/12afghan.html> (accessed July 7, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> "The Other War: Why Bush's Afghanistan problem won't go away," *The New Yorker* April 12, 2004. Available at: [http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/04/12/040412fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/04/12/040412fa_fact) (accessed 7 July 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Rohde and Sanger, *ibid*.

<sup>21</sup> MSNBC.com, "Bush praises Pakistan's help in terror fight," March 5, 2006. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11651039/> (accessed July 9, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Andrew F. Tully, "Afghanistan: Bush, Karzai Agree on Strategy Against Terror." *RadioFreeEurope/Radio Liberty*, September 27, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1071654.html> (accessed July 9, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> "Winning in Afghanistan: Afghan Force Development," Center for Strategic and International Studies Report, December 14, 2006, <http://csis.org/publication/winning-afghanistan-2> (accessed July 8, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Confirming the "main effort" identified by Anthony Cordesman in his December 2006 article, in a Congressional Research Service Report, Catherine Dale wrote that the primary goal of the October 2008 JCP for Afghanistan was "'transfer of lead security responsibility' to the Afghans, which includes planning as well as conducting operations" (Dale, *ibid*, p. 8).





- Governance and Justice (Main Effort)
  - Responsive, representative, and capable governments at all levels
  - Extend reach of Afghan government
  - Credible Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF)
- Economic Development
  - Viable Provincial/District level infrastructures
  - Determine Afghan needs at local level
  - Flexible approach to reconstruction
- Border Strategy
  - Develop cross border cooperation with Pakistan Military
  - Interdict Taliban network
  - Collaborative operations and planning
  - Effective, responsible tactical communications

### **Expanding to a More Regional View**

During a briefing to the press in Islamabad on January 12, 2007, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher said the Bush administration recognized extremist groups operating from Pakistan posed a threat to both Pakistan and Afghanistan. According to a US State Department report, he also said that:

...military force alone is insufficient to secure the border region. The true challenge...is not only extending the government's authority to the border regions, but also the benefits of government, such as new roads, better schools, a sound justice system and business opportunities that would provide area residents alternatives to build better lives.

The United States can support efforts with more reconstruction, more security, more opportunity for people on the Afghan side, and we can support Pakistan's efforts to provide more opportunities, more economic opportunity in better governance and more security for people on the Pakistani side.<sup>25</sup>

### **Finally, a Clear Statement of Goals and Implementing Tasks**

A month later, during a speech at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, DC, President Bush outlined the US strategy in Afghanistan. The message to Afghanistan, he

said, was: "We will train you, we will help you, and we will stand with you as you defend your new democracy."<sup>26</sup> This speech was combined with a February 15, 2007 White House press release that reported "The Administration recently completed a top-to-bottom review of its Afghanistan strategy."<sup>27</sup> The highlights of the White House Fact Sheet included the following statements:

America Has a Clear Goal in Afghanistan. We will help the people of Afghanistan defeat the terrorists, and establish a stable, moderate, and democratic state that respects the rights of its citizens, governs its territory effectively, and is a reliable ally in the War on Terror.

The President is asking Congress for \$11.8 Billion Over The Next Two Years To Help President Karzai Defeat Our Common Enemies And Help the Afghan People Build a Free and Successful Nation.

The President has also ordered an increase in U.S. forces in Afghanistan – by extending the stay of 3,200 troops now in the country by four months and by deploying a replacement force that will sustain that increase for the foreseeable future.

The White House Fact Sheet also declared that the US strategy was focused on "Several Key Goals," excerpted below:

1. The United States And Our Allies Will Help President Karzai Increase The Size And Capabilities Of The Afghan Security Forces.
2. America Will Work With Our Allies To Strengthen The NATO Force In Afghanistan.
3. The United States And Our Allies Will Help President Karzai Improve Provincial Governance And Develop Afghanistan's Rural Economy.
4. The United States And Our Allies Will Help President Karzai Reverse The Increase In Poppy Cultivation That Is Aiding The Taliban
5. The United States And Our Allies Will Help President Karzai Fight Corruption — Particularly In Afghanistan's Judicial System.
6. The United States Will Help President Musharraf Defeat The Terrorists And Extremists Operating Inside Pakistan And Work With Afghanistan And Pakistan To Increase Cooperation In The Fight Against Terror.

<sup>25</sup> David McKeeby, "Progress Seen in Security Pakistan-Afghanistan Border," *America.gov* January 17, 2009. [www.america.gov/.../2007/January/20070117164543idybeekcm0.9265406.html](http://www.america.gov/.../2007/January/20070117164543idybeekcm0.9265406.html) (accessed 7 July 2009).

<sup>26</sup> David McKeeby, "Bush Announces New Plan for Afghanistan: President urges allies to join U.S. in helping democracy succeed," *America.gov* February 15, 2007, <http://www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2007/February/20070215155239idybeekcm0.8339807.html#ixzz0KZmCtrGM&D> (accessed 7 July 2009).

<sup>27</sup> "White House Outlines U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan: President seeking \$11.8 billion over two years to assist Afghan government" *America.gov* February 15, 2007, <http://www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2007/February/20070215115104abretnuh0.7379267.html#ixzz0KZmShbFY&D> (accessed 7 July 2009).



### **Engage the “Reconcilables”**

Perhaps inspired by the perceived success of similar efforts in Iraq, in what appears to be its final evolution the Bush administration also approved the concept of trying to split away “moderate” members of the Taliban from hard core extremists. According to MSNBC.com, in September 2007 an Afghanistan government spokesman said that President Karzai and President Bush had discussed initiating a Taliban reconciliation process and that Bush expressed support.<sup>28</sup> One year later, General David Petraeus confirmed to reporters that such an approach was “being examined as an option.” *USA Today* reported that “Petraeus stressed it was premature to discuss strategy but suggested he will carry over lessons from his playbook in Iraq – including possible outreach to try to bring hostile players into the political process.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Cross-Border Remote Missile Strikes**

According to the *New York Times*, in July 2008 President Bush approved US ground raids into Pakistan in order to disrupt extremist infiltration into Afghanistan. This followed action by the CIA, which had “for several years fired missiles at militants inside Pakistan from remotely piloted Predator aircraft.”<sup>30</sup>

### **The Campaign Plan for Afghanistan**

In November 2008, General McKiernan—the ISAF commander at the time—released the following unclassified summary to be posted on the *Small Wars Journal* website:<sup>31</sup>

#### **MISSION**

ISAF conducts operations in partnership with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) and in coordination with Operation Enduring Freedom, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the international community in order to assist GIRoA to defeat the insurgency, establish a secure environment, extend viable governance, and promote development throughout Afghanistan.

#### **LINES OF OPERATION**

Security  
Governance  
Reconstruction and Development

### **COMPREHENSIVE AND INTEGRATED APPROACH**

Comprehensive: Working concurrently across all three lines of operation.

Integrated: Operating in a coordinated manner with GIRoA and the international community.

### **KEY PLANNING FACTORS**

Counterinsurgency campaign.

Shape, in order to clear in order to hold and build.

Prioritize the areas to clear and hold.

Establish and maintain freedom of movement.

Apply greater effort on the narcotics-insurgency nexus.

Identify and engage key Afghan community leaders.

Interdict and disrupt insurgent movement to and from sanctuaries in the border region.

Build Afghan capability, capacity, and credibility.

### **The Obama administration takes charge**

The war in Afghanistan was a high profile topic on the campaign trail for Candidate Obama. During a visit to Kabul in July 2008, for example, he told CBS news: “For at least a year now, I have called for two additional brigades, perhaps three....I think it’s very important that we unify command more effectively to coordinate our military activities. But military alone is not going to be enough.”<sup>32</sup>

Consistent with a promise during his 2008 presidential campaign, within three days of his inauguration President Obama continued the missile strikes in Pakistan and approximately one month later expanded the scope of such strikes. As reported by Mark Mazzetti and David E. Sanger, “The strikes are a sign that President Obama is continuing, and in some cases extending, Bush administration policy in using American spy agencies against terrorism suspects in Pakistan....”<sup>33</sup>

The new Obama administration announced February 10, 2009, that Bruce Riedel—described by the *Los Angeles Times* as “a former CIA official and harsh critic of former President Bush’s handling of the conflict in Afghanistan—would chair a White House review of US policy on Afghanistan and Pakistan.”<sup>34</sup> Part of Riedel’s remit would be to tie together the other high level reviews being conducted by US Government agencies, including the Joint

<sup>28</sup> Associated Press, “Taliban fighters defy Afghan authorities,” September 30, 2007, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21055255> (accessed July 7, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Kim Gamel, “Petraeus: more than troops needed in Afghanistan,” September 14, 2008, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-09-14-3357186908\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-09-14-3357186908_x.htm) (accessed July 7, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Eric Schmitt and Mark Mazzetti, “Bush Said to Give Orders Allowing Raids in Pakistan,” September 11, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/11/washington/11policy.html> (accessed July 9, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/isafcampaignplansummary.pdf> (accessed 27 May 2008).

<sup>32</sup> “Obama calls situation in Afghanistan ‘urgent’” *CNN.com*, July 21, 2008, <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/07/20/obama.afghanistan/> (accessed July 13, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> CBS News/Associated Press, “Pakistan Strike First on Obama’s Watch,” January 23, 2009, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/01/23/terror/main4749317.shtml> (accessed July 9, 2009); and Mark Mazzetti and David E. Sanger, “Obama Expands Missile Strikes Inside Pakistan,” *The New York Times* February 21, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/21/washington/21policy.html> (accessed July 9, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> Julian E. Barnes, “Obama team works on overhaul of Afghanistan, Pakistan policy” February 11, 2009, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/feb/11/world/fg-us-afghan11> (accessed July 13, 2009).



Chiefs of Staff and US Central Command. However, it was reported that President Obama was likely to approve a significant increase in US forces, as previously requested by the Pentagon, prior to completion of the strategy review.<sup>35</sup>

On February 17, 2009, the Pentagon reported that President Obama had approved the deployment of 17,000 additional US soldiers and marines to Afghanistan. According to CNN, a military official said “the goal is to have enough troops to ‘seize and hold’ territory and maintain basic security, which hasn’t been possible under current troop levels.”<sup>36</sup> Slightly more than one month later on March 27, 2009, joined on the dais by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, President Obama said: “Today, I am announcing a comprehensive, new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. And this marks the conclusion of a careful policy review, led by Bruce [Riedel], that I ordered as soon as I took office.”<sup>37</sup>

### Highlights of the Af-Pak Strategy

In his remarks announcing the new strategy, President Obama stated:

“We are in Afghanistan to confront a common enemy that threatens the United States, our friends and allies, and the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan who have suffered the most at the hands of violent extremists. So I want the American people to understand that we have a clear and focused goal: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future.”<sup>38</sup>

He further said that:

- “The future of Afghanistan is inextricably linked to the future of its neighbor, Pakistan”.
- The people of Pakistan want “an end to terror, access to basic services, the opportunity to live their dreams, and the security that can only come with the rule of law”.
- “...we must isolate al Qaeda from the Pakistani people”.
- The deployment of 17,000 additional troops “will take the fight to the Taliban in the south and the east, and give us a greater capacity to partner with Afghan security forces and to go after insurgents along the border... At the same time, we will shift the emphasis of our mission to training and increasing the size of Afghan security forces, so that they can eventually take the lead in securing their country”.
- A goal of 134,000 ANA and 82,000 police would be met by 2011.

- The military push must be joined by “a dramatic increase in our civilian effort...we need agricultural specialists and educators, engineers and lawyers”.
- “We cannot turn a blind eye to the corruption that causes Afghans to lose faith in their own leaders. Instead, we will seek a new compact with the Afghanistan government that cracks down on corrupt behavior, and sets clear benchmarks, clear metrics for international assistance so that it is used to provide for the needs of the Afghan people”.
- “...there will be no peace without reconciliation among former enemies”.
- “And we will continue to support the basic human rights of all Afghans – including women and girls”.
- “...we will set clear metrics to measure progress and hold ourselves accountable.” These would include actions to:
  - Assess efforts to train ASF and progress in combating insurgents
  - Measure growth of Afghanistan’s economy and illicit narcotics production
  - Confirm that the right tools and tactics are being used

The president’s speech was accompanied by a White House press release, titled “What’s New in the Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.”<sup>39</sup> It emphasized the following characteristics:

- An Attainable Objective
- A Regional Approach
- Building Capacity and More Training
- Using All Elements of National Power
- Bringing new international elements to the effort

Both the speech and the press release also reported that besides the 17,000 additional US troops that President Obama had approved in February 2009, another 4,000 would be deployed as trainers for the Afghan National Army and Police. The White House press release identified the “core goal” of the new strategy as “disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and its safe havens.” As will be discussed further below, this is presented in a manner that gives the impression that it sets a lower bar for success compared to the goals of the previous administration, which explicitly included the promotion of democracy.

In addition to the president’s speech and the White House press release, a policy White Paper was also published.<sup>40</sup> It generally echoed the president’s remarks, stating that the US “core goal” is to “disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and its safe

<sup>35</sup> Karen DeYoung, “Afghan Conflict Will Be Reviewed: Obama Sees Troops As Buying Time, Not Turning Tide,” *The Washington Post* January 13, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/12/AR2009011203492.html>

<sup>36</sup> Barbara Starr, *CNN.com*, February 17, 2009, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/02/17/obama.troops/index.html>

<sup>37</sup> The White House, “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan,” *The Blog*, March 27, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/09/03/27/A-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/> (accessed May 28, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> The White House, “Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan” March 27, 2009, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/)

<sup>39</sup> White House Press Office, (ibid).

<sup>40</sup> “White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group’s Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan” [http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/afghanistan\\_pakistan\\_white\\_paper\\_final.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/afghanistan_pakistan_white_paper_final.pdf)



havens in Pakistan, and to prevent their return to Pakistan or Afghanistan. It also laid out the following five objectives:

- Disrupting terrorist networks in Afghanistan and especially Pakistan to degrade any ability they have to plan and launch international terror attacks;
- Promoting a more capable, accountable and effective government in Afghanistan;
- Developing increasingly self-reliant Afghan security forces that can lead the counterinsurgency and counterterrorism fight;
- Assisting efforts to enhance civilian control and stable constitutional government in Pakistan and a vibrant economy;
- Involving the international community to actively assist.

On its second page, however, the White Paper describes an “end state” which is far broader than the “core goal.” It seeks to achieve “the removal of al Qaeda’s sanctuary, effective democratic government control in Pakistan, and a self-reliant Afghanistan that will enable a withdrawal of combat forces while sustaining our commitment to political and economic development.” Interestingly, the word “democracy” is not used in conjunction with Afghanistan yet supporting elections and improving governance are listed among the important tasks.

### So what’s new in the Obama administration’s strategy?

Although different in geographic focus, the Obama administration’s new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan is similar in many ways to both the Bush administration’s pre-surge strategy for Iraq published in 2005 and the outline of the Bush strategy for Afghanistan that was released in 2007.<sup>41</sup> When asked by Margaret Warner during an interview on *The News Hour* what was different from the Bush plan, Obama’s envoy to the region, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, could identify few specifics other than being “an integrated policy” with “far more resources.”<sup>42</sup>

The Obama strategy for Afghanistan-Pakistan and the Bush pre-surge strategy for Iraq look especially similar. Each of them:

- Claimed to be “comprehensive,” while being ambiguous about the definition of this term, and stated that defeating terrorists is a vital interest of the United States;
- Recognized that some armed groups might be reconciled to the elected government but others, like al Qaeda, could not be brought into the peaceful political process and thus would require so-called “kinetic” operations to kill or capture terrorists;

- Recognized the problem of insurgent and terrorist infiltration from neighboring safe havens;
- Announced plans to enlarge and train the host nation’s army and police so they could eventually take responsibility for securing their own country.

Bush in 2005 and Obama in 2009 both promised to assist, encourage, and cajole national leaders to develop their economy, improve governance, and reduce corruption. Each stated they would identify metrics to track their strategy’s progress and said they would use benchmarks to press the respective host nation governments to implement the rule of law and be responsive to the needs of their populations.

However, in addition to providing more troops and more funding the Af-Pak strategy seems to have two “Big Ideas” that present a clear change from the Bush strategy for Afghanistan as it had evolved by 2008. First, in the Obama strategy success in Afghanistan is strongly bound with the situation in Pakistan (thus, an Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy rather than another Afghanistan strategy). Although the Bush administration belatedly recognized the influence of the situation in Pakistan upon that in Afghanistan, and the problems generated when the Taliban and other extremists had a safe haven where they could escape from coalition operations in Afghanistan and regroup, it did not integrate consideration of the two states into a single broad strategy. This is an important, major new contribution to the US and allied strategy in the region.

Second, the new strategy gives the impression of an attempt to lower the bar by setting a more readily achievable goal. Rather than the broad goal announced by the Bush administration on February 15, 2008 to “help the people of Afghanistan defeat the terrorists, and establish a stable, moderate, and democratic state that respects the rights of its citizens, governs its territory effectively, and is a reliable ally in the War on Terror,”<sup>43</sup> the Obama administration distilled the purpose of operations in Afghanistan into the defeat of al Qaeda and elimination of its safe havens.

Yet when reading the “fine print,” it becomes clear that the Af-Pak strategy is consistent with US counterinsurgency doctrine and its execution will require the full range of efforts from providing population security, building Afghan security force capabilities, promoting economic development and improving governance to reducing corruption. Interestingly, the word “democracy” is used only in the context of Pakistan’s government. However as noted previously, the White Paper *implies* a democratic Afghanistan by including among its stated objectives “Promoting a more capable, accountable, and effective government in Afghanistan.”<sup>44</sup> It

<sup>41</sup> The Bush administration’s *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, dated November 30, 2005, can be downloaded at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/30/AR2005113000376.html> (accessed April 15, 2009)

<sup>42</sup> Interview transcript, “Obama Sets Plan to Boost Afghan Stability, Confront Taliban and Al-Qaida,” March 27, 2009, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/jan-june09/afghanpak\\_03-27.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/jan-june09/afghanpak_03-27.html)

<sup>43</sup> “White House Outlines U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan: President seeking \$11.8 billion over 2 years to assist Afghan government”, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the Af-Pak strategy takes Afghan democracy as a given, so it is not necessary to mention it as a goal. If so, this further blurs any difference in the level of ambition between the Bush and Obama strategies.





also says that the strategy endeavors to “strengthen the relationship between the Afghan people and their government” and recommends “bolstering the legitimacy of the Afghan government.” One of the specified tasks is to “do everything necessary to ensure the security and legitimacy of voter registration, elections, and vote counting.”

The main substantive difference between the goals of the two strategies in this regard seems to be that the Bush administration stated that Afghanistan would be a “moderate” democratic state. Instead, the Obama Af-Pak strategy gives the desired nature of the Afghanistan government as being “legitimate” and “a capable, accountable, and effective government...that serves the Afghan people and can eventually function, especially regarding internal security, with limited international support.” Furthermore, in the section regarding reconciliation with “non-ideologically committed insurgents” the Af-Pak strategy says that such efforts “must not become a mechanism for instituting medieval social policies that give up the quest for gender equality and human rights.” These characteristics seem to imply a moderate government.

Perhaps the Af-Pak strategy is intentionally leaving open a theoretical possibility that some other form of Afghan government might be able to defeat Al Qaeda, quiet the extremists, and adequately serve the people of Afghanistan. However, it is extremely difficult to imagine anything other than a moderate democracy being able to achieve the goals of the Af-Pak strategy while simultaneously being sufficiently consistent with NATO member state values to retain the necessary levels of military and economic development support.

### Strategic and operational implications

The announcement of a “new” strategy may buy some time with domestic publics, but is unlikely to produce a rapid shift in the situation. By stating that the “core goal” is to “disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda,” the Obama strategy gives the impression of lowering the bar from the previous goal of spreading democratic values and thus being easier to achieve. Yet as the preceding analysis shows, implementing the strategy will require a full-scale counterinsurgency effort that includes providing security for the Afghan population, increased economic development programs, and improving the quality and effectiveness of the Afghan government at the national, regional, and local levels. Especially considering the deterioration of the security situation, the new strategy will very likely require greater levels of US and allied effort rather than less.

### Coalition Troop Levels

In short, the Af-Pak strategy will probably increase demands upon—and tensions within—NATO instead of representing a solution that would reduce stress upon the alliance. Underlying tensions about decision-making and burden sharing remain unresolved, and possibly exacerbated. As was the case with his predecessor, it is likely that Obama will eventually have to recognize that he hasn’t devoted enough resources to achieve his stated goals. Where will these come from?

The initial approval to send another 17,000 troops plus 4,000 trainer/advisors is probably only a down payment. The Associated Press reported that before being relieved, ISAF commander General David McKiernan told President Obama that another 10,000 troops would be needed but “the White House put off that decision until the end of the year.” It also reported that on July 16, 2009, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said “I think there will not be a significant increase in troop levels in Afghanistan beyond the 68,000, at least probably through the end of the year. Maybe some increase, but not a lot.”<sup>45</sup>

According to the Washington Post, while talking to US military leaders in Afghanistan during the last week of June 2009, US National Security Advisor James L. Jones implied that commanders should not request additional forces. Reporter Bob Woodward wrote that Jones had warned that “after all those additional troops, 17,000 plus 4,000 more, if there were new requests for force now, the president would quite likely have ‘a Whiskey Tango Foxtrot moment.’”<sup>46</sup> As Peter Feaver has pointed out, if Woodward’s article is accurate this incident could be yet another similarity to the Bush administration’s experience in Iraq: some reporters (including Woodward) have claimed that senior civilians discouraged senior military leaders from providing honest professional advice about troop levels by intimating that the president did not want to hear requests for more troops.<sup>47</sup>

Yet Woodward also wrote:

The question of the force level for Afghanistan, however, is not settled and will probably be hotly debated over the next year. One senior military officer said privately that the United States would have to deploy a force of more than 100,000 to execute the counterinsurgency strategy of holding areas and towns after clearing out the Taliban insurgents. That is at least 32,000 more than the 68,000 currently authorized.

American and other coalition force levels are likely to remain problematic for quite some time. There is no consensus

<sup>45</sup> “Defense Secretary Says More Troops May Head to Afghanistan,” July 16, 2009, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/07/16/defense-secretary-says-troops-head-afghanistan/>

<sup>46</sup> As Woodward explains, this is a well-known acronym in the US military meaning “What the [expletive]?” See “Key in Afghanistan: Economy, Not Military,” *Washington Post* July 1, 2009, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/30/AR2009063002811\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/30/AR2009063002811_pf.html)

<sup>47</sup> “The White House and Woodward,” *ForeignPolicy.com Shadow Government Blog*, July 1, 2009, [http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/07/01/the\\_white\\_house\\_and\\_woodward](http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/07/01/the_white_house_and_woodward)



among counterinsurgency experts, yet a frequently cited rule of thumb suggests a ratio of 20 security force members per 1,000 in population is needed for success in counterinsurgency. (This figure, however, is hotly disputed.<sup>48</sup>)

Using this rule of thumb, an Iraqi population of approximately 27.5 million would require roughly 550,000 security force members to quell a burgeoning insurgency. The “surge” in 2007 appeared to succeed with a far smaller ratio: approximately 169,000 troops from coalition forces.<sup>49</sup> However, the personnel available to conduct operations in Iraq also included a large portion of the 440,000 members of Iraqi Security Forces (soldiers and police) that had at that time been trained and equipped by Multi-National Force-Iraq. Furthermore, these Iraqi forces were complemented by approximately 92,000 “Sons of Iraq” irregular forces that have been described by the US Department of Defense as “a strategic asset that directly contributed to the 83% reduction in violence in the Baghdad Security Districts since August 2007.”<sup>50</sup> Although there were questions about the capability and reliability of Iraqi regular and irregular security forces (as is the case with Afghanistan Security Forces), the total number of security force members to population probably exceeded 20 per 1,000.

With an Afghan population of almost 32 million, following the 20 per 1,000 formula would require approximately 640,000 troops and police.<sup>51</sup> Even if the planned increase of Afghan Security Forces to 216,000 (army and police) by 2011 is completed on schedule, this total plus approximately 68,000 US and 33,000 non-US coalition troops results in not quite half the ratio of total security force members to population that was used to turn the corner on violence in Iraq.

Following his participation in General McChrystal’s “60-day Assessment,” Anthony Cordesman argued that the US “must deploy a substantial number of additional brigade combat teams and ‘enablers,’” and that the US should be ready to “deploy 3-6 more brigade combat teams during the coming year if required, but constantly monitor the overall progress in

the war and Afghan government actions and cooperation and support.” However, he also notes that:

...*shape, clear, hold, and build* involve new forms of war fighting where force requirements cannot be predicted with precision. Past troop-to-task would require far higher levels of US forces [than] 3-6 more brigade combat teams, but such ratios ignore the impact of technology, new tactics, a civil-military approach to war and the role of civilian partners, and the ability to build up major new [Afghan National Security Forces] reinforcements over the [next] two years. At the same time, force requirements may be increased by new insurgent tactics and added foreign volunteers, instability in Pakistan, and the lack of adequate civilian partners and capability.<sup>52</sup>

While theoretically possible, it seems highly unlikely that current force levels will prove sufficient in the near term. The need for additional troops will place continuing pressure on NATO members to at least maintain the size of their present deployments, if not to increase their contributions, in order to partially offset concerns about a “two tier alliance” and “Americanization of the war.”<sup>53</sup>

A critical component of the Af-Pak strategy, as was the case with the Bush administration’s approach, is helping to build capable and reliable Afghan National Security Forces. The creation of NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan could prove to be a significant contribution, but results remain to be seen. Even best case, the creation of sufficiently large and capable ASF is many years away.<sup>54</sup> General George Casey, the US Army Chief of Staff, recently said that “training of local police and military in Afghanistan was at least a couple years behind the pace in Iraq, and it would be months before US deployed enough trainers. A significant expansion of the Afghan National Army above the 134,000 already envisioned in the Af-Pak strategy, perhaps double this number, is under consideration.<sup>55</sup> However, a recent report by Oxford Analytica

<sup>48</sup> Although commonly prescribed, this is a disputed figure. See James T. Quinlivan, “Burden of Victory: The Painful Arithmetic of Stability Operations.” *RAND Review*, Summer 2003 at: <http://www.rand.org/publications/randreview/issues/summer2003/burden.html>

<sup>49</sup> US Government Accountability Office, “Iraq: Key Issues for Congressional Oversight,” March 2009, GAO-09-294SP, p. 42, <http://gao.gov/new.items/d09294sp.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> US Department of Defense, “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, December 2007, pp. 29 and 19, [http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/9010\\_Report\\_to\\_Congress\\_Dec\\_08.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/9010_Report_to_Congress_Dec_08.pdf). The number of Iraqi Security Forces actually performing duty may have been as little as one-half of the total reported as trained due to casualties, absent-without-leave, and other attrition.

<sup>51</sup> Soviet Forces in Afghanistan peaked at approximately 115,000. A total of approximately 620,000 Soviet troops served in Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989. See Richard F. Nyrop and Donald M. Seekins, *Afghanistan: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: The American University, 1986); and Oleg Kulakov, “Lessons learned from the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan: Implications for Russian Defense Reform,” NATO Defense College Research Paper #26 (March 2006). During this period the Soviets also provided more than \$13 billion in military aid to the Afghan regime and substantial foreign aid that was comprising 70% of the Afghan state’s income when it was halted in 1991 (Anton Minkov and Gregory Smolyneec, “Economic Development in Afghanistan During the Soviet Period, 1979-1989: Lessons Learned from the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan,” Defense R&D Canada, DRDC CORA TM 2007-35, August 2007).

<sup>52</sup> “The Afghanistan Campaign: Can We Win?” Center for Strategic & International Studies, July 22, 2009, [http://csis.org/files/publication/090722\\_CanWeAchieveMission.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/090722_CanWeAchieveMission.pdf), pp. 21-22.

<sup>53</sup> See Timo Noetzel and Benjamin Schreer, “Does a Multi-Tier NATO Matter? The Atlantic Alliance and the Process of Strategic Change,” *International Affairs* March 2009, <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/ia/download/-/id/2363>; and Stephen Castle, “U.S. Gains More Control as It Fights Afghan War,” *New York Times* June 11, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/12/world/asia/12nato.html>

<sup>54</sup> See C.J. Chivers, “Erratic Afghan Forces Pose Challenge to U.S. Goals,” *New York Times*, June 7, 2009: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/08/world/asia/08afghan.html?th&emc=th>

<sup>55</sup> Cordesman, “The Afghanistan Campaign: Can We Win?” p. 11.



argues that a rapid, significant expansion of the Afghan National Army will be problematic due to a retention rate of only 53% and shortfalls of volunteers, qualified officer candidates, and logistical support capabilities.<sup>56</sup>

Developing host nation forces able to secure their own population is perhaps the keystone of US counterinsurgency doctrine—and the Af-Pak strategy. Yet at this stage of the insurgency, this goal still presents more of a challenge than a solution. We remain some distance away from a quantity and quality of Afghan forces that would enable the withdrawal of coalition forces to begin—the point where, in the words of President Bush in the context of Iraqi Security Forces, “as they stand up we stand down.”<sup>57</sup>

As a critical element of its strategy, the Obama administration must decide how much and how quickly it can rely upon Afghanistan’s army and police forces to secure their own population. An early failing in Iraq was a rush to hand security responsibilities over to unreliable and inadequately trained Iraqi security forces in lieu of deploying the necessary level of US forces. Blunders such as the creation of the Fallujah Brigade, described by Thomas Ricks as having “far more in common with the insurgents than they ever would with the [US] Marines,” proved to be steps backward instead of the hoped for shortcuts to victory.<sup>58</sup>

### **Economic Development and Good Governance**

Typically conceived as the “civilian” components of counterinsurgency, these elements are arguably outside NATO’s portfolio. The most common phrase over the past few years about the war in Afghanistan is probably that it “cannot be won by the military alone.” Yet the paradox is that while NATO’s leverage over civilian entities is extremely limited, military success in Afghanistan is inseparably linked to the accomplishment of non-security objectives such as the delivery of basic services, offering economic opportunity, and achieving the perception that an elected Afghan government is a better choice for the population than the Taliban.

Unlike Iraq, the greatest challenge in Afghanistan has been nation-building from the ground up rather than reconstruction and stability. Tens of billions of dollars more in economic development assistance will be required during at least another decade of armed nation-building. Yet the US and other NATO members have yet to figure out how to implement an effective comprehensive approach within

single member states (i.e., “whole-of-government” efforts) much less between ISAF contributors or in concert with key civilian elements of the international community.

Describing this as the problem of “Dealing with a Dysfunctional Mix of NATO/ISAF, National, UNAMA, and International Community Efforts,” Anthony Cordesman asserts:

NATO/ISAF and the US have sometimes been as serious a threat to themselves as the insurgency and the limitations of the Afghan government. To win, they must create an effective civil-military effort where civilian partners – and aid efforts in governance, economics, and rule of law – directly support or complement NATO/ISAF and US efforts to defeat the insurgency and create effective and legitimate levels of governance in the field.<sup>59</sup>

Space limitations preclude repeating much of what has been written elsewhere regarding the challenges of putting together military and civilian efforts in stability and counterinsurgency operations.<sup>60</sup> However, it is imperative that ISAF develop and incorporate into its organizational structure integrated civil-military command teams at every echelon from the regional commands to the district level.

The creation of the Integrated Civilian-Military Action Group (ICMAG) in Kabul<sup>61</sup> is a very good step in the right direction. However, in addition to such efforts between US forces and the US Embassy in Kabul, ISAF headquarters needs better integration with embassies of all the major force contributing nations, the European Union, United Nations Mission-Afghanistan, and major non-governmental organizations. As the largest force contributor and provider of the ISAF commanding general, it has perhaps been too easy for the US—especially the State Department and US Agency for International Development—to concentrate solely on US interagency coordination efforts. Despite, and precisely because of, the political hurdles similar efforts are required to integrate all the coalition civil-military efforts. Equally, the Afghan government—including its senior military commanders—must be brought into the planning process as full partners.

Although popular with the politicians in Washington, hardly any expert on Iraq believes that the Congressional benchmarks<sup>62</sup> were positive on the whole in changing the

<sup>56</sup> “Afghanistan: Army expansion is no easy option,” *Oxford Analytica*, March 26, 2009.

<sup>57</sup> NewsHour interview with Jim Lehrer, December 16, 2005: [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/white\\_house/july-dec05/bush\\_12-16-05.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/white_house/july-dec05/bush_12-16-05.html).

<sup>58</sup> *Fiasco* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), p. 343.

<sup>59</sup> Cordesman, “The Afghanistan Campaign: Can We Win?” p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> For more discussion on this topic, see Christopher M. Schnaubelt: “The challenge to operationalizing a comprehensive approach,” in *Operationalizing a comprehensive approach in semi-permissive environments*, NDC Forum Paper Number 9: <http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=79>

<sup>61</sup> See “Prepared Statement of Ambassador John E. Herbst, Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, Before the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs,” US House of Representatives, May 19, 2009 : <http://nationalsecurity.oversight.house.gov/documents/20090519132337.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> See Council on Foreign Relations, “What are Iraq’s Benchmarks,” March 11, 2008: <http://www.cfr.org/publication/13333/>



behavior of the Iraqi government. This observation begs the following questions: How can the US and its allies force a democratically elected government to change its behavior? Would threats to withdraw American support be credible and effective? If not, will President Obama really be willing to walk away after the investment of so many lives and dollars?

Among the significant problems with the benchmarks established for Iraq was their design by a US Congress with the opposite party in majority having a view of disciplining the Bush administration as much as presenting a road map for the success of the Iraqi government. At the time of writing, the Obama administration has yet to release its benchmarks for Afghanistan (or Pakistan).

However, a better model would be the International Compact with Iraq.<sup>63</sup> This document was developed as a mutual agreement between the Government of Iraq and the international community. As such, it not only brought a broad range of ideas into the mix but also buy-in from Iraqi leaders. It was more of an agreement of how to make progress than a mechanism for administering “carrots and sticks.” Whichever route the Obama administration chooses to pursue in ensuring that aid is effective and properly spent, the Afghan government, NATO, and the International Community should be involved in the process of establishing the goals and monitoring progress.

## Conclusion

For the most part, the Af-Pak strategy is a continuation of the plans and policies of the Bush administration as they had evolved by the end of 2008. It provides a coherent framework for implementing counterinsurgency and development efforts to the war in Afghanistan and will significantly increase the US military and financial resources devoted to carrying out the strategy.

If *adequately resourced and properly implemented*, the strategy has a good chance of turning around the security situation in Afghanistan and achieving the goals of the coalition and the elected government of Afghanistan while supporting the aspirations of the Afghan people. However, it is likely that even higher troop levels and greater developmental aid will be required. Furthermore, successful implementation will require much better integration of planning and execution between military and civilian efforts, national contingents, and the US/NATO and the international community.

For NATO, the Af-Pak strategy will mean more hard work ahead, more tensions over burden sharing and decision making, and a call for at least maintaining the present level of military effort, if not providing even greater force contributions. However, if properly resourced and wisely executed it also presents a reasonable probability of success in the largest “out-of-area” and combat mission in NATO’s history.

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<sup>63</sup> See: International Compact with Iraq official website: <http://www.iraqcompact.org/en/>