DECEMBER
2010

Responsible Transition

Securing U.S. Interests in Afghanistan Beyond 2011

By LTG David W. Barno, USA, (Ret.) and Andrew Exum

Center for a
New American
Security

About this report

"Responsible Transition" is part of a broader Center for a New American Security (CNAS) project that explores long-term U.S. interests in Central and South Asia. The "Beyond Afghanistan" project is led by CNAS Senior Fellow and Senior Advisor Lieutenant General David W. Barno, U.S. Army (Ret.), and CNAS Fellow Andrew Exum. CNAS gratefully acknowledges financial support from the Smith Richardson Foundation, which makes this project possible.

Acknowledgments

We would like to sincerely thank our colleagues at the Center for a New American Security for their unstinting support throughout this project. We are especially grateful to Nathaniel Fick, John Nagl and Kristin Lord for their leadership of CNAS and guidance and insights surrounding this project specifically. Dr. Lord provided invaluable guidance throughout the research and writing of this report. The report also benefited from excellent research support from Matthew Irvine, Travis Sharp, Sorina Crisan and Jessica Glover. Matthew Irvine's contributions far exceeded those normally performed by a researcher; we benefited immensely from his in-depth knowledge of this topic.

In addition, we received thoughtful comments and suggestions from a number of external reviewers and experts including Thomas Ricks, Joshua Foust, Austin Long, Chris Mewett, Doug Ollivant, Craig Mullaney, Geoff Lambert, Christian Bleuer, Richard Fontaine and Brian Burton, among others. The CNAS production staff, led by Liz Fontaine, was instrumental in getting this product in final form. We sincerely thank all of the above-named individuals for their help. This report would have looked considerably different without their constructive commentary.

Finally, we would like to give special thanks and a heartfelt salute to the thousands of young men and women of the U.S. military and allied nations who have served and continue to serve in Afghanistan. We hope that this report will help better illuminate the rugged path in front of you. Your sacrifices will not be forgotten.

The authors alone are responsible for the content of this report, including its judgments, recommendations and any errors of omission or commission.

Cover Image

U.S. Army Sgt. Randy Dombrowski, from Ocklawaha, Fla., is silhouetted by the setting sun in the mountains near Sar Howza, Paktika province, Afghanistan. Dombrowski is deployed with Bulldog Troop, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment.

(STAFF SGT. ANDREW SMITH/U.S. Army)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECEMBER 2010

Responsible Transition

Securing U.S. Interests in Afghanistan Beyond 2011

By LTG David W. Barno, USA, (Ret.) and Andrew Exum

About the Authors

LTG David W. Barno, USA, (Ret.) is a Senior Advisor and Senior Fellow at the Center for a New American Security.

Andrew Exum is a Fellow at the Center for a New American Security.

RESPONSIBLE TRANSITION
SECURING U.S. INTERESTS IN AFGHANISTAN BEYOND 2011

By LTG David W. Barno, USA, (Ret.) and Andrew Exum

DECEMBER 2010

Responsible Transition

Securing U.S. Interests in Afghanistan Beyond 2011

RESPONSIBLE TRANSITION

SECURING U.S. INTERESTS IN AFGHANISTAN BEYOND 2011

By LTG David W. Barno, USA, (Ret.) and Andrew Exum

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The summer of 2011 will mark a watershed in the United States and NATO's* decade-long effort in Afghanistan. Although it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of the U.S. "surge" and NATO's current counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy, by next summer either the unmistakable outlines of progress or deepening evidence of problems will emerge. By that time, the United States and its allies will also have a clearer picture of the choices being made by both the Afghan and Pakistani governments, which will prove central to the strategy's long-term success or failure.

A second watershed occurs in 2014. President Barack Obama has cited July 2011 as the point at which leadership of military operations must start to transition from U.S. to Afghan security forces, and at which U.S. surge forces should begin their return home, pending conditions on the ground in Afghanistan. President Hamid Karzai, for his part, has identified 2014 as the year in which Afghans should assume full responsibility for the security of Afghanistan. The November 2010 NATO conference in Lisbon signaled that the United States and its NATO allies increasingly look to 2014 as the year of full transition of NATO efforts to Afghan leadership.[1]

No immediate solution to the war in Afghanistan is likely. The war increasingly resembles a "wicked problem" in which both the constraints and required resources change over time.[2] After nine years of inconclusive fighting, all outcomes are likely to be suboptimal for the United States, its allies and the Afghan people. This report recognizes the yeoman efforts of the last nine years but focuses on the difficult road ahead.

* Throughout this report, we use "NATO," "NATO forces" and "International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF)" interchangeably when speaking of international forces in Afghanistan. We recognize that not all forces in ISAF are from NATO nations, but as ISAF is a NATO-led multi-national effort, we find this a useful simplification. We also often separate "U.S." from "NATO" in describing military efforts (recognizing that the United States is a NATO member) when it helps to describe better the origins of the forces depicted.

The purpose of this report is to identify vital U.S. interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to outline how the United States can transition, between July 2011 and 2014, from a large-scale and resource-intensive counterinsurgency campaign to the more sustainable U.S. and allied presence we deem necessary to protect those interests. This change aims to shift the balance of fighting the Taliban from U.S. forces to Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) by 2014 while focusing a smaller number of residual U.S. forces on the long-term threat from al Qaeda. This shift is designed to contain the most dangerous threats emanating from the region and to secure U.S. vital interests while expending the minimal cost necessary in terms of troops, dollars and lives. It is both time-driven and conditions-based, recognizing the need for flexibility while guarding against an unlimited commitment of resources. The strategy laid out in this report differs from those identified in several recent reports in its characterization of both the size and duration of residual U.S. forces.

To preserve the security of the United States and its interests throughout the world, we recommend a "Responsible Transition" to a sustainable end game in Afghanistan, specifically:

- The United States and its allies should commit to a long-term presence in Afghanistan to safeguard vital U.S. interests beyond 2011 and signal to allies and rivals a continued U.S. investment in the region.
- The United States should focus its residual forces on efforts to defeat al Qaeda throughout the region while supporting a shift to the ANSF leading the continued fight against the Taliban by 2014. Residual U.S. and allied forces will ultimately consist mainly of special operations forces.
- The United States and its allies should begin a phased transition, starting in July 2011, from a large-scale mission employing in excess of 140,000 troops to a more sustainable presence of 25,000-35,000 troops. This enduring U.S. military presence will be sized to both support and enable sustained ANSF combat against the Taliban and maintain relentless U.S. pressure on al Qaeda.
- The United States should support a successful NATO transition in Afghanistan that enables U.S. allies to return the majority of their forces to Europe and Canada while sustaining a limited contribution of Special Operations Forces (SOF) and trainers to Afghanistan.
- The United States and its allies should shift their direct investment in the government in Afghanistan away from Kabul and toward local governance.
- The United States should use greater political, military and economic leverage over its allies in Pakistan to drive more aggressive action against violent extremist organizations in the region.

II. INTRODUCTION

"The status quo is not sustainable.…I have determined that it is in our vital national interests to send an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan. After 18 months, our troops will begin to come home. These are the resources that we need to seize the initiative, while building the Afghan capacity that can allow for a reasonable transition of our forces out of Afghanistan."

-President Barack Obama,
December 1, 2009

As the United States enters its 10th year of fighting in Afghanistan, reports of progress are mixed at best. A recent White House report assessing the war through June 30, 2010 was striking in its candor: "Progress across the country was uneven," and nationwide "district-by-district data show that only minor positive change had occurred with respect to security." The report judged the operational effectiveness of Afghan Army and Police units "uneven;" worse yet, it deemed the performance of the Karzai government, the most important strategic partner to the United States in this war, "unsatisfactory throughout the first half of 2010."[3]

The Obama administration has articulated consistently its desired policy outcome in Afghanistan and Pakistan: "To disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda and its safe havens in Pakistan, and to prevent their return to Pakistan or Afghanistan."[4] Between the March 2009 interagency white paper and President Obama's December 1, 2009 speech to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, however, the president and his national security team rejected a long-term, fully resourced counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan in favor of a more limited, shorter-term strategy intended to transfer lead security responsibility to Afghan forces as soon as possible.[5] This transition will enter a new phase in July 2011, when the United States begins reducing its troops in Afghanistan. Missing from the president's strategy to date, however, is any mention of the "end game" in Afghanistan – what the enduring U.S. presence and commitment would look like, or if there would be one at all.

It is time to recognize that the war in Afghanistan will not end in July 2011, and that the United States and its allies need a new strategy for the next phase as well as operational guidance regarding how they can best protect their long-term interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan while responsibly drawing down their troop presence. In this report, we aim to demonstrate how the United States and its allies can transition from a resource-intensive counterinsurgency campaign to a less costly – and thus more sustainable – strategy in Afghanistan. The report recommends a long-term U.S. presence, although one markedly smaller, focused on defeating al Qaeda, with additional U.S. capabilities aligned to support the ANSF as it takes ownership of its nation's fight against the Taliban. This approach in effect substitutes Afghan National Security Forces for the large U.S. conventional forces executing counterinsurgency tactics against the Taliban in Afghanistan today. In so doing, this report provides a responsible alternative to an exit strategy that ends the U.S. presence by precipitately turning the war over to the Afghans and coming home, once again abandoning Central Asia as the United States tried in the 1990s to devastating effect. Any strategy the United States and its allies choose will involve difficult trade-offs and risks – and it will be executed in one of the world's most challenging physical, human and political environments. There are no perfect – or even good – solutions.

The American people must recognize the painful reality that the United States and its allies are locked in a long-term struggle against violent transnational Islamist extremists and their ideology. The syndicate of al Qaeda-inspired violent extremist groups and their animating ideology has not "burned out," or diminished. The threat

of attack, to the homeland or to U.S. interests overseas, persists. This fight will necessitate worldwide commitments of U.S. intelligence assets and special operations forces for years – perhaps decades – to come. However, though al Qaeda and its affiliates reach widely, with a significant presence in places such as Yemen and Somalia, the Afghanistan-Pakistan region remains a powerful center for much of this movement and a critical joint in the nexus among groups such as al Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET). Continued military, intelligence, economic and political pressure is required globally to deny these groups freedom of action and eventually degrade their capabilities to the point that they do not threaten U.S. interests. But given the global nature of current and potential demands on the U.S. military, and the high economic price the United States is paying, Americans have the right to question whether the prolonged deployment of tens of thousands of general purpose forces (GPF) to execute a large-scale counterinsurgency in Afghanistan is a sound strategy and whether it is, in fact, making them safer.

Over the last century, the overwhelming strength of the U.S. economy has allowed the United States to spend whatever it needs on defense. But in the coming years, unprecedented deficits and a rapidly growing national debt will place greater pressure on all elements of U.S. discretionary spending – including defense.[6] Thinking through political, informational, military and economic lines of operation in Afghanistan, this report attempts to craft an effective middle ground between large unsustainable expeditionary force commitments that would sap the long-term power of the United States and "offshore" minimalist strategies that would fail to disrupt, dismantle and defeat transnational terror groups. The way ahead in Afghanistan is not a complete withdrawal from the country but rather a sustainable limited presence that conserves U.S. resources, contains threats and protects vital U.S. interests in the region. This strategy is written within the parameters established by the governments in Washington and Kabul, both of which have stated their desire for a transfer of security responsibility in Afghanistan to the Afghans by the end of 2014.

This report seeks to articulate a commitment of U.S. policy and resources to Afghanistan and its immediate strategic neighborhood in 2011 and beyond. The strategy defines enduring U.S. interests in Afghanistan and the region by assessing the current strategic context of U.S. involvement in the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It highlights the dynamics of transitioning to a balanced strategy that promotes both "bottom-up" and "top-down" approaches to security and engages the relevant actors throughout the region. Finally, this strategy articulates how the United States should transition toward a sustainable and enduring role in Afghanistan in pursuit of U.S. vital interests in the region after July 2011.

III. ENDURING U.S. INTERESTS IN AFGHANISTAN

The drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, scheduled to begin in July 2011, will mark nearly 10 years of war against al Qaeda and the Taliban. As the United States enters its second decade of military engagement, it is important to identify U.S. interests in the region and focus future strategies around the pursuit of those interests. Clarity in what the United States seeks to accomplish is a prerequisite to accomplishing those goals, avoiding the misuse of resources and ensuring that the strategy is coherent and appropriate. The twin threats of al Qaeda-inspired terrorism and nuclear proliferation into terrorist hands are considered vital interests because they threaten the United States and its citizenry directly; they represent threats so serious that the United States would go to war to defend against them. Important interests, such as promoting regional stability, countering the narcotics trade and protecting human rights benefit the United States, but they do not rise to the level of directly threatening the security of the United States.

Vital U.S. Interests

The United States has many interests in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the rest of Central and South Asia, but only two can be considered vital and thus worth the continued expenditure of U.S. blood and treasure. The first vital interest concerns al Qaeda and associated movements. The United States has a vital interest in preventing AQAM, groups committed to violent and even catastrophic attacks on American citizens and soil, from returning to safe havens in Afghanistan akin to those they enjoyed prior to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The United States also has a vital interest in continuing to degrade and disrupt AQAM and eliminate safe havens in Pakistan in order to prevent future attacks against the United States and its allies. Despite al Qaeda's metastasizing to places such as Yemen and the Horn of Africa, the core of its leadership and the geographic heartland for its international struggle remains firmly in the Afghan-Pakistan border region.[7]

The second vital interest concerns the stability of Pakistan. The United States cannot allow Pakistan's nuclear weapons to fall into the hands of violent extremist organizations or any other enemy of the United States.[8] Accordingly, the United States supports a strong Pakistani state capable of maintaining control of both its nuclear arsenal and its territory, particularly from internal threats. The outcome of events in neighboring Afghanistan will play a key role in the ultimate stability of the Pakistani state. A return to Afghan civil war could embolden Pakistan's own internal insurgency, potentially undermining Pakistan's fragile stability.[9]

Important U.S. Interests

The United States has many other interests in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the surrounding region. The most important of these interests is regional stability: A war between India and Pakistan, two nuclear-armed nations, or the spread of destabilizing Islamist insurgencies to the states of Central Asia would be disastrous. Further, state failure in Pakistan – owing to financial crisis, popular unrest or insurgent disruption – could upend the region's fragile balance of power in potentially catastrophic ways. A Taliban return to control in Afghanistan would energize the global jihadist movement, motivate insurgent groups in Pakistan and across the region, endanger democracy and human rights in Afghanistan and deal a blow to widely held standards of freedom and justice in the region and around the world. An Afghan civil war fought by proxies of regional neighbors could also prove a destabilizing and bloody outcome of a precipitate U.S. departure. While U.S. support for human rights in both Afghanistan and Pakistan is an important interest, it is not a vital one. The United States has been a powerful advocate for human rights across the globe, but it has rarely intervened

militarily to protect them. The same can be said for countering the spread of illicit narcotics. This strategy clearly recognizes risks to these important but not vital interests.

The way in which the United States deals with Afghanistan – its first conflict of the 21st century – will be studied across the globe for any portent of a decline in U.S. power. Will the United States abandon its friends when things get tough? Can the powerful U.S. military be defeated by insurgent extremists fighting a prolonged or irregular war? Is the United States going to play a major role in the resource-rich economies of Central and South Asia, or will it cede the region to other powers and return to a post-Cold War idyll that ignores the region entirely? These questions will be asked by rivals of the United States such as Iran and China as well as by U.S. allies in the region. While perceptions of U.S. power today may prove ephemeral tomorrow, an Internet-savvy, ideologically based jihadist network with global reach and aspirations might leverage a wholesale U.S. disengagement from Afghanistan to fuel a compelling narrative of revolution that would serve as a useful recruiting tool. The second-order effects of the next U.S. choices in Afghanistan should not be underestimated.

IV. CURRENT STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Time

President Obama's December 2009 West Point speech pledged an additional 30,000 American troops for Afghanistan, raising U.S. force levels there to nearly 100,000 troops – a threefold increase from just two years prior.[10] The president was also clear, however, about the aim and duration of this "surge:" By July 2011, the United States would begin transferring leadership responsibility for Afghanistan's security to the Afghan government, and U.S. troops would begin to return home. The Afghan government has itself set a date of 2014 for the completion of the transfer of security responsibilities.[11]

The president, with his speech and the establishment of the July 2011 date, sought to deliver two messages: The first message, aimed at the populations of troop-contributing nations as well as the U.S. public, was a commitment to these groups that the United States would not remain in Afghanistan with large numbers of troops indefinitely. This commitment solidified the support of European allies until the summer of 2011, but it also showed them "light at the end of the tunnel" with a pledge to eventually draw down their forces – a message also important to elements of President Obama's political base. The second message, which the president failed to communicate effectively, sought to convince the Afghan people – as well as the insurgent groups and their sponsors – that although U.S. troop levels might decline, a strong U.S. commitment to Afghanistan would remain over the long term. Predictably, in the region this part of the president's message was reduced to one line: The Americans are leaving.[12]

The peoples of Afghanistan and Pakistan – including the governments in both countries as well as insurgent groups – are watching closely how the United States and its allies manage the transfer of responsibility to the Afghan people by 2014.[13]

Will the transfer be deliberate and orderly or will it be hasty and disorganized, focused on delivering an allied "exit?" And individuals at every level of society are asking themselves this: "How do I best position myself for what comes next?"

Cost

The United States historically has acted to secure interests it deems "vital" no matter the cost. In today's troubled economic environment, however, fiscal restraint will shape long-term U.S. commitments to Central and South Asia. The U.S. public is rightly beginning to question the proportionality of its large commitment in Afghanistan relative to security gained.[14] Designing a strategy that takes into account the economic and fiscal climate in the United States while safeguarding American lives (both those at risk while defending U.S. interests in Afghanistan and those saved by degrading al Qaeda's ability to wage attacks) is essential to sustain both congressional and public support for the long-term effectiveness of the strategy. The strategy will still be costly, both financially and even more consequentially in American lives. Yet sustaining the strategy is a necessary burden to bear in order to protect American interests.

The United States today views the challenges of Afghanistan from within a greatly changed strategic context than that of nine years ago. The raw emotion of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 has receded, and the global economic world in which the United States and its allies live has also changed. The global financial crisis of 2008 has eroded economic security for nations and individuals across much of the developed world. Europe especially is entering a period of unprecedented fiscal austerity, with steadfast U.S. allies such as the United Kingdom slashing their defense budgets.[15]

The United States itself has amassed stunning levels of debt: By 2020, projections show that every U.S. household will own 170,000 dollars of government debt. A recent International Monetary Fund staff paper projects that U.S. federal debt could equal the U.S. gross domestic product of approximately 14 trillion dollars by as early as 2015.[16] By 2018, the baseline U.S. defense budget of about 550 billion dollars will be matched by annual interest payments on that debt, which will only grow thereafter.[17] Maintaining the current force presence of more than 100,000 U.S. soldiers and Marines in Afghanistan costs nearly 120 billion dollars per year.[18]

The United States historically has acted to secure interests it deems "vital" no matter the cost. In today's troubled economic environment, however, fiscal restraint will shape long-term U.S. commitments to Central and South Asia.

Americans tend to believe that the United States can afford to spend whatever is required to fight and win its wars; the loss of scores of young men and women in combat every month is far harder to rationalize, and inflicts a much deeper wound than the costs of printing more currency. Indeed, the human cost of the war to those whose lives have been touched, American, allied or Afghan, is simply incalculable. Thousands of Afghan civilians and soldiers have died in the conflict since 2001, with numbers increasing in recent years. By way of comparison, the United States lost 52 soldiers in Afghanistan in 2004; by 2009, that figure leapt to 317.[19] The year 2010 is on track to be the deadliest

Subnational and Transnational Groups

Threats to the United States and its friends and allies from transnational groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan have not receded. They have merely changed. Various non-state actors in Central and South Asia operate as terrorist and insurgent groups against the United States and its interests. The following outline summarizes many of the major subnational and transnational militant actors of the region that threaten U.S. operations and interests in Afghanistan and in the region. The following survey of regional actors is in no way exhaustive, but it sketches the most prominent groups challenging U.S. interests.

AL QAEDA

The al Qaeda of 10 September 2001 no longer exists: Al Qaeda no longer lives "above ground" or enjoys de facto control of Afghanistan. Intelligence reports suggest that fewer than 100 al Qaeda fighters currently operate in Afghanistan, and relentless strikes against the organization have thus far contributed toward their inability to strike again in the United States. The organization remains dangerous, however, and now operates in a highly decentralized manner with its senior leadership in Pakistan.[27] Al Qaeda has spawned loosely connected global franchises that have transformed the threat and al Qaeda's brand in new ways. Nonetheless, the al Qaeda network remains a direct threat to the United States and its interests.

QUETTA SHURA TALIBAN

The Taliban were driven from power in Afghanistan by the United States and its allies in the fall of 2001. Starting around 2005, the Taliban began to reconstitute in Pakistan and has since grown both in strength and in ability to strike U.S. and allied targets within Afghanistan. Pakistani security services are widely believed to have played an instrumental role in the reconstitution of the Taliban as a way of maintaining a strategic hedge against the likelihood the United States and its allies would eventually leave Afghanistan.[28] The United States and its allies have severely damaged the ranks of the Taliban since 2009, but reconciliation with the government in Kabul is unlikely unless blessed by both the Taliban's senior leadership and Pakistani security services. The Taliban, given its orientation toward Afghanistan, represents an indirect threat to the United States and its interests.

HAQQANI NETWORK

The Haqqani Network is a strong, tribally based federation led by Jalaludin and Sarajudin Haqqani in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas and the eastern provinces of Afghanistan.[29] Traditionally considered a client of Pakistan's intelligence services, and host to al Qaeda, the Haqqani Network is the most violent group facing U.S. military forces in Afghanistan today. Ideologically, the Haqqanis are closely aligned with Osama bin Laden and the neo-Taliban movement and are thus considered the major insurgent group least likely to reconcile with the government in Kabul. Haqqani fighters have been linked to attacks against U.S. and Indian targets and are believed to have a close operational relationship with many transnational groups in the tribal regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan.[30]

TEHRIK-I-TALIBAN PAKISTAN

The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is a federation of Pakistan-based Taliban groups aligned against the Pakistani government. This broad coalition has extensive political and operational ties to the Afghan Taliban, including the Haqqani Network.[31] The coalition is based primarily in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan and is influenced by al Qaeda fighters in the region, most notably in its agitation against Pakistani security forces and the government. Alarmingly, the TTP planned the attempted bombing in Times Square in New York City in May 2010.[32]

LASHKAR-E-TAIBA

Lashkar-e-Taiba is a Pakistan-based militant group originally sponsored by the Pakistan security services to operate against Indian forces in Kashmir. The group has international capabilities and the potential to shape world events, including the possible triggering of a full-scale war between India and Pakistan.[33] In November 2008, LET operatives seized control of the Taj Mahal hotel and other sites in downtown Mumbai, killing 163 and nearly sparking a regional war, increasing the risk of nuclear conflagration.[34]

Lashkar-e-Taiba is closely affiliated with al Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban in Pakistan and shares much of the same international jihadist ideology. LET enjoys sanctuary in Pakistan because of its close ties with state security services and pronounced anti-Indian posture.[35]

HEZB-E-ISLAMI GULBUDDIN

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HiG) is the least significant of Afghanistan's major insurgent groups. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has a hard-earned reputation for brutality and is despised by most Afghans.[36] It is unlikely that Gulbuddin himself could ever serve in the Afghan government, but his organization remains the insurgent group most likely to eventually reconcile with the government in Kabul.

CRIMINAL NETWORKS

Criminal networks operate throughout Afghanistan and Pakistan, contributing resources to insurgent and terrorist groups as well as undermining the rule of law and state sovereignty. A variety of illicit anti-state actors in both countries rely on the narcotics trade as well as smuggling and kidnapping to survive in the illicit economies of the region. Al Qaeda and regional groups such as the Haqqani Network and the Quetta Shura Taliban are actively involved in criminal enterprise and derive much of their funding and logistics from these operations.[37] These networks threaten state authority and expose government and security officials to cultures of corruption and intimidation.

LOCAL ACTORS ("ACCIDENTAL GUERILLAS")

Many fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan are not directly linked to the global or regional aspirations of al Qaeda or the Taliban (whether the Quetta Shura Taliban or TTP). These militants are a product of the "accidental guerilla syndrome" articulated by David Kilcullen.[38] Outside groups including both national security forces and militant networks can provoke, coerce or recruit these fighters to join their respective cause. They are in effect "warriors for rent." It is difficult to estimate the total number of local actors operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan today.

WARLORDS AND CORRUPT OFFICIALS

Corruption stemming from illicit money throughout Central and South Asia has had a debilitating effect on legitimate governance and has widely undermined honest civil servants. Those benefiting personally from the torrent of foreign money flowing through Afghanistan today will likely oppose any option that scales back those resources. Fewer dollars means more competition for scarce funding. When the bulk of those dollars no longer flow through the government in Kabul, corrupt government officials lose clout as well as profits. Warlords in some provinces may gain strength and stature in any forthcoming change; others will lose out.

year ever for NATO and the United States. Six hundred twenty-five soldiers have died as of November 1, 2010, among them 441 Americans. Casualty figures for the ten-year war reflect the deaths of 1,254 Americans and 820 allied troops.[20]

More than nine years into the conflict, the increasing human and material costs of the war have contributed to dwindling public support. The war's costs, and what is won by absorbing them, will be central as policymakers consider the future. Regardless of the strategy's exact shape, though, this much is clear. An unsustainable strategy – one that does not balance means with ends – is not a strategy at all.[21]

The Regional Landscape

As President Obama weighs his choices in the coming months, he should recognize the broader realities that will influence how the United States ends (or sustains) the war in Afghanistan. Both China and India – the rising giants of Asia – have deep interests in Afghanistan, politically and economically. Both are carefully assessing how the United States plays its hand; neither would view a full U.S. disengagement or U.S. failure as a desirable outcome.[22] Should the United States withdraw precipitously, one or both might feel compelled to intervene more directly in Afghan affairs, drawing two major powers plus other regional actors into direct competition within Afghanistan. In that circumstance, the prospects for Afghanistan devolving into a civil war between the proxies of outside powers are real, with consequences that could destabilize and threaten the security and prosperity of the entire region.[23]

On the other hand, these same interests can also lead both China and India toward providing much-needed investment in Afghanistan. In 2008, China made the largest foreign investment in Afghan history, purchasing a 30-year lease on the Aynak copper deposit in eastern Afghanistan for more than 3 billion dollars. The Aynak deposit, if fully exploited, is worth an estimated 88 billion dollars.[24] Both China and India are aggressively pursuing regional development projects, most notably, massive infrastructure development programs focused on roads and ports.[25] Their economic influence in Afghanistan will only grow stronger in the future, and it will have a significant long-term impact on prospects for Afghan economic growth.

The repercussions of what the United States and its allies do in Afghanistan and Pakistan extend far beyond China and India. The war in Afghanistan features many regional actors vying for influence, control and power vis-à-vis one another and the United States.[26] For example, diplomatic tensions between the United States and Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan will affect the ability of the United States and its allies to move supplies into Afghanistan. In the same way that Pakistan is seeking to maximize its influence in Afghanistan through support for insurgent proxies, so too are India and Iran attempting to maximize their influence through material support for the regime in Kabul and other actors in Afghanistan. The vacuum potentially created by U.S. disengagement would likely lead many of these actors to play a more aggressive role to advance their interests. In short, the "Great Game" of historic competition over Afghanistan remains equally plausible today. This undercurrent of regional interests and regional interference provides an enduring backdrop to the ongoing war – and could set conditions for an explosive subsequent conflict. All of this, to say the least, complicates decision-making for the United States and its allies.

V. TOWARD A BALANCED STRATEGY

The next phase in the U.S. effort in Afghanistan should be an indirect approach, with the Afghan government assuming overarching responsibility for its national defense, while the United States enables the effort through sustainable and supportive unconventional warfare, counterterror operations and security assistance programs. The United States will advise and assist ANSF, employ special forces to attack al Qaeda and leverage U.S. airpower and technology as enablers for both operations.

Although this report focuses primarily on the transition of military forces, it also calls for a changed political approach – potentially the most controversial aspect of any new strategy. A balanced strategy for Afghanistan must confront the hard realities and recognize the limits of the Afghan political system. It should reorient U.S. political and economic efforts in light of the lessons of recent years and the unmistakable trends emerging in Kabul, in the provinces and in Pakistan.

The components of this strategy make up a more realistic political strategy and a more sustainable military strategy. The political strategy includes a top-down approach that sustains limited efforts to increase the capacity of the central government; a bottom-up effort that invests in local governance with new energy; a regional segment that directly addresses the issue of Pakistan; and an informational element that confronts the enemy narrative while supporting U.S. goals and interests. The military strategy outlines a more limited commitment of U.S. troops that better balances investments with ends desired, and it offers a reshaped long-term force posture with U.S. forces focused primarily on the threat posed by AQAM and Afghan National Security Forces taking ownership of the conflict with the Taliban.

The Political Strategy

TOP-DOWN APPROACH

Top-down efforts in Afghanistan should build on past modest successes but recognize the limits of U.S. and Kabuli influence. For nine years, the United States and its allies have invested in expensive capacity-building of the central Afghan government but seen only limited results. Recent disappointments combined with Afghanistan's long history of weak central government argue for a more realistic objective: limited central government with power devolved to the provinces and districts. U.S. assistance to the Afghan national government should continue but focus more narrowly on supporting it in matters of state such as protecting territorial integrity, internal security and national level infrastructure development, while pressing for the delegation of much more power to local leadership councils outside Kabul.

The unfortunate state of the Afghan central government today justifies this difficult conclusion. By the summer of 2011, Hamid Karzai will have been in office as interim or elected president of Afghanistan since 2002. Over much of the same period, the United States has spent 336 billion dollars on the war in Afghanistan, spanning both military and development efforts.[39] By 2009, Afghanistan ranked among the most corrupt nations in the world, much worse than in 2005.[40] Vast outlays of international resources have been wasted, stolen and diverted – with an overall impact that has been deeply disappointing. The United States and its allies deserve substantial blame for this disaster – it is their well-intended aid that fueled much of this corruption – but Afghans, including President Karzai, are more culpable still.

Efforts to reform and build capacity in the Afghan central government since 2002 have had limited effect. Of the 25 Afghan government ministries, only a few can be viewed as functional: Defense, Finance, Health, Interior and the National Directorate of Security among

them.[41] The government of Afghanistan remains unable to finance even a modest proportion of its expenses. Afghanistan is already the world's most extreme example of a rentier state, as demonstrated by Astri Suhrke.[42] A staggering 69 percent of President Karzai's budget in 2004 and 2005 was financed externally. By 2009, the situation had not improved, with 32 percent of the budget financed by a collection of revenues.[43] (By way of comparison, even at the height of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1982, only 29 percent of Afghanistan's budget was financed by aid.) Very little of this aid – of which the United States donated roughly half between 2001 and 2009 – can be considered effective.[44] Looking forward, the international community should continue to reinforce high-priority ministries where significant impact is possible and measurable successes have been achieved. Where prospects for change are dim, the international community should consider removing western aid and diverting scarce dollars toward other successful programs.

The economic component of the new strategy should be reshaped to prioritize the improvement of the macro conditions necessary to enable sustained Afghan economic growth. U.S. development activities should enable the acceleration of Afghan private sector growth by focusing on large-scale projects that enable business growth such as communications, power, water, transport and related infrastructure as well as the development of a functioning legal system that makes investment attractive to both Afghan entrepreneurs and foreign investors. Afghanistan's central geographic location in Central Asia positions it well to serve as a conduit for pent-up demand for north-south and east-west trade from across the region. Road, rail, power and pipeline networks all hold major potential as engines of future growth – and must be a focus of U.S. and international attention. The discovery of substantial reserves of mineral wealth inside Afghanistan only makes this focus on infrastructure development all the more important. Unlocking and managing this significant Afghan economic power could potentially be as important to Afghanistan's long-term stability as military operations.

The demands of managing relations with President Karzai and his senior government officials in this changed environment will be challenging. Karzai is likely to strongly oppose any change to the current U.S. support for the government of Afghanistan – especially a change that reduces material aid to his government or seeks to empower local leaders at his expense.[45] Dramatic reductions in troops and dollars flowing into Afghanistan could severely affect both licit and illicit components of his nation's economy. Costs to the United States – much of it spent on military operations in Afghanistan – may decrease by as much as 80 percent as troop levels diminish. The shadow economy of corruption derived from foreign aid and military spending will be reduced, as will the tens of thousands of Afghans employed to support 140,000 NATO troops and their tens of thousands of support personnel. The initial impact of this downturn, however, will simply return Afghanistan to the levels of troops and spending of 2005 – permitting the start of an orderly transition to an Afghan economy based on trade and transit rather than warfare and drugs.[46]

Under pressure from the United States, President Karzai may fall back on alliances with warlords or precipitously sign on to agreements with insurgent groups whose terms are harmful to U.S. interests. A clear narrative that explains to both the Karzai government and the Afghan people that the United States is entering a new and more sustainable phase of its engagement may gradually help mitigate against some of the most erratic potential reactions. Karzai must be convinced that this new approach represents the most realistic and sustainable option for him, his government and the people of Afghanistan. Such an approach may, in fact, be more in line with Karzai's strategic

The United States should now adopt a stronger bottom-up approach to governance, investing in those local power structures and leaders who best represent the local populations, in lieu of the Kabul-centric approach favored until now.

preferences than the current strategy: This strategy helps fulfill his goal, for example, for a long-term strategic partnership with the United States while significantly reducing U.S. "boots on the ground," one of his recurrent concerns.[47] Given the near-decade long commitment to date, coupled with diminishing public support for U.S. involvement at home, the alternative – an exit strategy focused on the United States and allies ending their military commitments entirely – must be seen as even less palatable to the leadership in Kabul.

BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

Over most of its history, when Afghanistan has been governed effectively, it has been governed in a decentralized manner.[48] Local governance, often executed through a traditional blend of overlapping tribal, family and state structures, has long been the decisive influence on ordinary Afghans, especially outside major urban centers. However, the Bonn agreement of 2001, and the Afghan constitution that followed, effectively created a centralized structure of government.[49] The United States was actively involved in this process, pouring significant resources in time and money over the last nine years into attempting to forge a functional central government that would radiate authority out to the provinces. The results, in light of this vast investment, have been disappointing. The experience of recent years – heavily focusing on the development of the central government at the expense of local institutions – has demonstrated that the central government in Kabul influences local governance only modestly, and sometimes in ways that disrupt the traditional patterns of local society.

The United States should now adopt a stronger bottom-up approach to governance, investing in those local power structures and leaders who best represent the local populations, in lieu of the Kabul-centric approach favored until now. Corrupt and inept government officials who lack local legitimacy can retard Afghanistan's prospects for long-term growth and threaten local gains achieved by coalition military and development efforts as much as the Taliban does. This approach need not create a zero-sum game with the central government in Kabul. It should work with Kabul-appointed governors when possible – but around them when necessary.

This transition is already under way. Given the many challenges of connecting local populations to Kabul, coalition military forces have in recent years begun to work more closely with local leaders of all backgrounds and rely less on central government initiatives to deliver effective local governance.[50] As the United States and its allies seek a more balanced strategy in Afghanistan, this effort should continue and expand. At the local and district levels, coalition military forces, diplomats and development officials must expand their partnership with a wide range of key actors across the traditional power structures of Afghan society to better assure lasting success. At the grassroots level outside the capital, aid and development must aim to empower local leadership and support local needs, while tying notable successes in government programs such as the Afghan National Solidarity Program.[51]

On Reconciliation

By Andrew Exum

Civil wars and insurgencies such as the one in Afghanistan usually end through some kind of negotiated settlement between the antagonists.[55] The war-weary American public is clearly eager to bring the majority of U.S. troops home, and the NATO command in Afghanistan has prioritized reconciliation just as much as fighting the Taliban and training the Afghan national security forces. Much time has been spent determining both the red lines of NATO and its Afghan partners and those areas in which they could compromise with the insurgent groups.

Qari Rahmat, foreground, listens as tribal headsmen and Afghan security force leaders discuss next steps in the reconciliation process, at Forward Operating Base Hughie in Jalalabad Afghanistan.

(SGT. TRACY J. SMITH/U.S. Army)

Afghans, however, are perfectly comfortable talking while still fighting. So too, at least in practice, are the United States and its allies: In insurgencies from Vietnam to Northern Ireland, the United States has negotiated with insurgents while combat operations were ongoing. In the American public's mind, however, wars take place sequentially: First, you fight; second, you negotiate a settlement. The word "negotiations" conjures up hopes for an end to the conflict in the minds of Americans and other Westerners – when all that really might be occurring is another round of jockeying for position between Afghanistan's warring political forces.

President Barack Obama, who carried out an otherwise responsible review of U.S. strategy in Afghanistan in the fall of 2009, blundered when he publicly announced that the United States would begin a withdrawal from Afghanistan in July 2011. Within the ranks of Afghanistan's insurgent groups and even among U.S. allies and the civilians in the country, this date was interpreted to mean that a total withdrawal of U.S. and allied forces was imminent. No insurgent group, to paraphrase defense analyst Stephen Biddle, was about to accept a loaf of bread when the bakery was on offer.[56] Why would the Taliban and other insurgent groups negotiate when the United States was on its way out already?

The problem of Afghanistan's varied insurgent groups also complicates reconciliation talks. Of the three principal insurgent groups, only Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin might be considered ripe for any kind of reconciliation with the government in Kabul. But the HiG is arguably the least significant of the major insurgent groups, and even then, Gulbuddin himself would not likely be allowed to play a role in an Afghan government.

Of the other two groups, the Haqqani network, under the leadership of Sirajuddin Siraj Haqqani, maintains strong ties to al-Qaeda and is considered more or less irreconcilable, and the Quetta Shura Taliban is thought to be reconcilable only if Mullah Mohammed Omar himself

approves of the reconciliation process. The insurgents in Afghanistan are no more unitary an actor than the Afghan government or the NATO coalition, further complicating negotiations.

All that, to make matters worse, assumes that the insurgent groups are independent actors. The reality, though, is that negotiations between the insurgent groups and the government in Kabul will go only as far as the Pakistani security services allow. Some Western analysts took heart in Pakistan's decision in February 2010 to arrest Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. At the time, however, the arrest of Mullah Baradar, who was in negotiations with the government in Kabul, was interpreted by the Taliban rank and file to be a stark warning to those who would negotiate without the permission of the Pakistani government, under whose patronage and protection the Taliban has operated east of the Durand Line since 2005. Today it is widely accepted that this was indeed the case and that Pakistan deliberately thwarted negotiations between the Quetta Shura Taliban and the government in Kabul to serve its parochial interests. Since that event, there has been no sign that Pakistan's powerful military has taken a softer line on negotiations between the Taliban and the government in Kabul.

Finally, if one surveys the history of civil wars and insurgencies, the evidence for negotiations leading to a more secure environment – without robust security operations first setting the conditions for those negotiations – is weak. The way the U.S. military established control over the population in Baghdad in 2007, by contrast, contributed to an environment that not only led formerly malign Sunni insurgents to join local security forces, but also provided time and space for a more peaceful political process to move forward.

A sliver of hope remains, however. Although the reporting of how the United States and its allies have "routed" the Taliban in southern Afghanistan has been very thinly sourced, it is clear the U.S. military has been attempting to replicate the success it had in Iraq in 2007 – destroying the midlevel operational leadership of the insurgent groups, which in turn collapsed the networks and rendered them ineffective. This strategy would add further momentum to prospects for reconciliation by extending the U.S. and allied presence in Afghanistan and disheartening insurgent groups that will have to convince their rank and file that another several years of hard fighting remain on the horizon.

This text box is drawn from a previous version written as online commentary for Foreign Policy magazine.

The nature of the U.S. relationship with Pakistan is one of the most complicated and frustrating elements of the war in Afghanistan and the global effort to degrade and defeat al Qaeda.

In adopting an approach that emphasizes engagement with local governance structures, the United States would not be promoting a return to warlord rule. The risks of local strongmen reasserting their influence in parts of Afghanistan, however, are a risk this strategy accepts. Today Afghanistan's constitution gives the president the power to appoint provincial and district (i.e., "state" and "county") governors from Kabul.[52] This arrangement has led to friction wherein local leaders and populations often have no say in and little identification with their "official" government representation and leadership. Not surprising, in many cases this has created tensions that have further distanced the people from the central government, with Kabul-appointed "outsiders" serving in key local leadership roles but often lacking legitimacy in the eyes of the governed. To date, prospects to revise this system by permitting districts and provinces to directly elect their governors are low.[53] However, by empowering local governance such as district and tribal leadership this plan can increase the leverage of its local partners and lessen their reliance on effective Afghan central governance.

The economic leg of a new U.S. strategy remains important, but its focus must also change. The allocation of development funds should prioritize local institutions such as district and tribal councils relative to Kabul. As in Kabul, greater investment must be made locally in identifying and reinforcing successful programs. In many areas, these investments will align with and support central government leaders and initiatives such as the widely acclaimed Afghan National Solidarity Program and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance.[54] But in areas beset by corrupt officials and dysfunctional programs, aid and development efforts that empower more traditional structures which for centuries have formed Afghan local governance may become the norm. These local structures are distinct from warlords in many – but not all – areas. U.S. development efforts led by the U.S. Agency for International Development must balance short-term and long-term investments that will both improve the lives of ordinary Afghans and support their traditional tribal and village leadership structures. While recognizing that Afghanistan remains a desperately poor country, the U.S. Congress and U.S. taxpayers have lost patience for corrupt and ineffective Afghan leaders and institutions. At this stage of the conflict, targeting U.S. aid and development dollars toward effective and less corrupt local entities is the best stewardship of taxpayer dollars and will ultimately serve the best interests of the people of Afghanistan.

THE POLITICAL STRATEGY: PAKISTAN

The nature of the U.S. relationship with Pakistan is one of the most complicated and frustrating elements of the war in Afghanistan and the global effort to degrade and defeat al Qaeda. Many pundits would argue that U.S. vital interests in the region lie primarily in Pakistan, and that any future U.S. role in Afghanistan must be shaped with that realization foremost in the minds of policymakers. The U.S. government rightly sees the maintenance of a stable Pakistan that is inhospitable to terrorists and in control of its territory and nuclear weapons as an essential outcome for any U.S. strategy. Yet Pakistan remains an immensely vexing partner, deeply committed to playing a "double game"

Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate

Instability and terror threats from inside of Pakistan have in some ways replaced the threat of a pre–September 11, al Qaeda-dominated Afghanistan as the preeminent U.S. concern in this volatile region. Pakistan and its security services have been both an ally and an enemy of the United States. Although an arm of the state, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate in many ways plays an independent role as a subnational actor in this context. On the one hand, Pakistani support has allowed the United States and its allies to continue to disrupt and degrade the ranks of al Qaeda and those insurgent groups that threaten Pakistan. Pakistan's military has also sacrificed greatly in the fight against Pakistani insurgent groups since 2009. On the other hand, Pakistan has at times adopted a conciliatory approach not only to al Qaeda but also to the groups that directly threaten Pakistani sovereignty, such as the TTP. In addition, Pakistan also covertly provides substantial safe haven to a myriad of Taliban groups fighting U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, whose aim is to overthrow the Kabul government; there is some evidence that ISI provides these groups training, equipment and direction as well.[60]

– hedging its bets against yet another U.S. exit from the region. Managing the relationship with Pakistan in ways that serve U.S. interests, strengthen a fragile Pakistani state, protect Afghanistan and improve overall stability in the region must be central goals of an effective strategy.[57]

The U.S. strategy toward Pakistan since the September 11th attacks has been one built around carrots and sticks. The United States has attempted to incentivize Pakistani cooperation with massive infusions of military and more recently foreign aid with varying success.[58] Although Pakistan has transitioned from military rule to a civilian government, its foreign policy has remained largely unchanged and decisively influenced by the Pakistani military. Pakistan's foreign policy rests on a security "triad" comprising its military, nuclear forces and state-sponsored proxy groups.[59] Increasingly, "irregular forces" or terrorist groups have formed a powerful asymmetrical weapon used by Pakistan to offset the crushing conventional superiority of neighboring India. Unfortunately, terrorist groups – even state-sponsored ones – often escape the controlling hands of their sponsors and take on a life of their own. One such group, the so-called Pakistani Taliban now forms an undeniable threat to the internal stability of the Pakistani state, attracting much attention and energy from Pakistani security forces in the northwest of the country. Despite this, the specter of India as the overwhelming existential threat to Pakistan's future continues to animate every aspect of Pakistani decision-making – especially concerning Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate continues to support, protect and at times guide insurgent groups, most notably through the Waziristan-based Haqqani network and the Quetta Shura Taliban operating from eastern Baluchistan.[61] Since late 2005, this threat has changed the balance of power inside Afghanistan, once again creating a powerful insurgency that now threatens Afghanistan's future. Moreover, these same insurgent groups are killing and wounding Americans, Afghans and U.S. allies with increasing effectiveness. The United States faces an intractable dilemma: an ally that supports U.S. interests in disrupting and containing al Qaeda at the very heart of its global network, yet that by most accounts simultaneously provides sanctuary, support and even guidance to groups attacking U.S. and allied forces in Afghanistan.

In light of this dilemma, the United States has in recent years elected a middle ground in dealing with Pakistan. Private pressure reportedly has been much tougher than public expressions

of support would suggest, but the net result has changed little. The loss of U.S. lives in Afghanistan from insurgent assaults enabled by this Pakistani duality is no longer tolerable, especially given Pakistan's lack of serious progress in addressing recurrent U.S. complaints.[62] Reserving complaints about Pakistani behavior to private discussions, the United States has clearly failed to change Pakistani support and sanctuary for the Afghan Taliban. Ultimately, the government of Pakistan is responsible for the sovereignty of its state territory and threats that grow within it.

The United States must now take a tougher stand with Pakistan – if necessary, in public. The United States holds immense leverage over the Pakistani government and military – the power of the purse. U.S. military and foreign aid to Pakistan currently tops 2 billion dollars per year.[63] Moreover, the United States exercises enormous leverage over the actions of the International Monetary Fund, to which the Pakistani government owes its economic stability. Despite Washington's worries over possible impacts on Pakistani cooperation on logistics and counterterror measures, the current situation is simply unacceptable. U.S. congressional pressure may force the Obama administration to act, or Congress may simply tighten the purse strings directly, restricting or shutting down generous U.S. aid. This eventuality must be made clear to Pakistan's leaders, civilian and military, and explicit expectations should be outlined for a major change in Pakistani behavior with regard to the Taliban.

Pakistan would be threatened by this shift in the U.S. approach. Pakistan's military and intelligence services, in supporting groups such as the Haqqani network and the Quetta Shura Taliban, have essentially wagered that the United States and its allies are leaving Afghanistan. Publicly committing to a long-term strategy in which the United States fights those insurgent groups by, with and through Afghan partners, in contrast, threatens a new kind of war that Pakistan's extremist allies cannot win in the longer term. With smaller U.S. residual forces committed to a protracted Afghan support and advisory engagement, "running out the clock" will no longer be a viable option for the Taliban or other insurgent groups.

Additionally, Pakistan will take great offense at the strategy's implicit potential for more aggressive covert and clandestine U.S. operations against al Qaeda and associated insurgent groups based in Pakistan. Pakistan could ameliorate this concern by dramatically improving its cooperation with U.S. intelligence agencies as well as by seriously cracking down on the freedom of action of insurgent groups within Pakistan. Today the relative uncertainty regarding the future of the U.S. presence in the region tips the Pakistanis toward a security calculus that supports the actors it knows will remain. Changing that calculus will require convincing the Pakistani government and military that the United States is staying, albeit in a different form. It provides a decisive means to address Pakistani fears of yet another U.S. abandonment.

POLITICAL STRATEGY: INFORMATIONAL ELEMENTS

The conflict in Afghanistan continues to be a battle of ideas between the United States and its allies, on the one hand, and AQAM and the Taliban movements, on the other. At this point, however, it is less an ideological struggle over "hearts and minds" than a fight over the narrative of the western commitment. President Obama's July 2011 "deadline" has been widely interpreted regionally as the end of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan and the beginning of yet another era in which the United States and its allies ignore Central and South Asia. Explicitly counteracting this narrative by affirming an enduring security commitment will both undercut enemies and encourage allies. Across the region and the globe, nations that have long been friends and allies of the United States are watching the denouement of the Afghan conflict with

concern. A reenergized and reshaped long-term U.S. effort will buttress their confidence in existing relationships with the United States as well as influence those on the fence that the United States remains a strong partner capable of sustained commitments.[64] In Kabul and across Afghanistan, a robust public diplomacy plan for the Afghan people implemented by the U.S. embassy will be important to explain the core message of the U.S. commitment contained in this plan.[65] Similar efforts in Islamabad and throughout Pakistan are required as well. Inherent in this message must be a commitment that the United States will stand by the people of Afghanistan in their fight, but that the transition to Afghan leadership is beginning. In effect, the U.S. message must change from "don't worry, we are leaving" to "don't worry, we are staying."[66] Afghans and Pakistanis alike will see the facts on the ground supporting the messages of policymakers.

The Military Strategy

A changed military strategy will form the core of the "Responsible Transition" approach. Although it is too early to determine the ultimate success or failure of the "surge" ordered by President Obama in his December 2009 West Point speech, outlining the next phase of military operations in Afghanistan is both appropriate and necessary. This focus does not discount or diminish the importance of parallel and complementary diplomatic and development initiatives; indeed, many of these have been addressed briefly above. But in an active conflict involving tens of thousands of troops and ongoing combat actions, both diplomacy and development by necessity must play supporting roles. Afghanistan holds our attention today because it is a war zone with vital U.S. security interests at stake.

We believe that "Responsible Transition" is the most likely strategy to succeed in protecting both vital and important U.S. interests at a sustainable cost in lives, national will and treasure. Yet we acknowledge that it is one of many competing approaches in deciding the way forward in Afghanistan. After nearly a decade of war, policy experts have offered varying, often conflicting, views of how best to achieve U.S. interests. Experienced defense and security officials disagree over the best course of action, some arguing for the rapid withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, others favoring greater counterterrorism efforts or proposing a long-term commitment to a fully resourced counterinsurgency strategy. Before outlining the "Responsible Transition" strategy, we survey the three key alternative approaches that have been suggested for Afghanistan: rapid withdrawal, the so-called counterterrorism-plus option and a more fully resourced long-term counterinsurgency campaign.

RAPID WITHDRAWAL

Some experts contend that the United States does not have vital national interests in Afghanistan and should initiate a rapid withdrawal of its military forces from the country. Many of these advocates argue that the United States can accomplish its counterterrorism obligations through offshore targeting – the use of limited aerial and special operations forces based outside Afghanistan to engage specific high-value targets – and diplomatic and intelligence engagement and liaison.[67] As outlined above, we believe that an enduring role for the United States in the region, to include continued training and support to ANSF and the maintenance of capable counterterrorism forces, is required to assure vital national interests. Early and wholesale withdrawal of U.S. forces will affirm the belief that the United States is not a reliable ally in the region and deny U.S. military forces a platform for sustained operations against a still deadly al Qaeda threat. Al Qaeda propaganda would leverage this "defeat" of the U.S. superpower to catalyze further global recruiting and likely increase its capabilities against the United States and its allies. Rapid withdrawal would also

provide the potential to rapidly tip Afghanistan into instability, precipitating a return to an Afghan civil war with the antagonists serving as proxies for hostile neighboring states. This outcome holds the risk of destabilizing the entire region, which would be much more problematic in a nuclear-armed subcontinent than was the case in the early 1990s.

A second-order effect of the rapid withdrawal of military forces from Afghanistan is the probable collapse of intelligence networks on both sides of the border that currently enable targeted counterterrorism operations. The presence of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, closely working with the local population as well as allied security services, maintains an irreplaceable intelligence infrastructure in support of continued operations. Targeting transnational terror groups becomes nearly impossible without the intelligence provided by networks on the ground. Additionally, some proponents of a hastened drawdown suggest that U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan – particularly air strikes – create new supporters for al Qaeda and its associated movements. In the strategy we propose, information operations combined with the refocusing of U.S. energies against AQAM in the region will lessen the propaganda value of these attacks and weaken the operational capabilities of al Qaeda and the movement more generally. (In addition, U.S. air strikes appear to have grown more accurate in recent months, with civilian casualties and other collateral damage declining.[68])The transition that we suggest – including a residual force to be sustained into the future – represents a responsible and cost-effective alternative to the immediate withdrawal of forces or the open-ended commitment of today's 140,000 U.S. and NATO troops.

COUNTERTERRORISM PLUS

Proponents of a reduced U.S. role short of a full-scale exit have outlined an option that would posit a modest U.S. Special Operations Forces capability of as few as 10,000 troops to sustain a counterterrorist (CT) effort in Afghanistan after the departure of conventional forces.[69] This argument asserts that threats to U.S. vital interests do not include the Taliban, and that a small U.S. footprint focused on al Qaeda would be able to preserve the advantages necessary to contain this deadly group while avoiding costly resource expenditures on peripheral threats to U.S. interests.

The principal flaw in this argument is that it leaves ANSF inadequately supported by critical U.S. enablers such as airpower and logistics against the resurgent Taliban, in effect cutting ANSF off from its key asymmetric advantages. A roughly 10,000-soldier U.S. contingent – less than 10 percent of the current forces – would be unlikely to include sufficient airpower, helicopter lift, advisers, reserves, or medical and logistics support for either remaining U.S. CT forces or Afghan forces that will be locked in combat with a still capable Taliban.

A rapid drawdown to a small CT-Plus force would also provide insufficient time to train and equip the ANSF to a size capable of successfully taking on the battle with the Taliban, an effort requiring at least several more years. The likely outcome of this option would be a Taliban defeat of the ANSF in many areas with a resultant destabilization of the government, leaving the insurgents with growing offensive power that would rapidly threaten to overwhelm any small residual U.S. CT presence. In that event, U.S. CT forces would find themselves locked in a battle for survival with an ascendant Taliban rather than focused on maintaining relentless pressure on al Qaeda. This situation would dramatically reduce pressure on al Qaeda, likely permitting it significantly greater freedom of action and space for planning attacks on U.S. soil than is the case today. Many critics argue that a limited counterterrorism approach to Afghanistan would also lead to a failed state, the return of al Qaeda and the destabilization of Pakistan.[70] Afghanistan might not collapse, but the safe havens the United States and its allies have struggled since 2001 to eradicate would likely reappear and expand. The probable outcomes of the

CT-Plus approach would undercut U.S. interests in the region, potentially destabilizing Afghanistan and forcing a major repositioning or complete withdrawal of U.S. CT forces, stripping their ability to effectively maintain pressure on al Qaeda and its local networks.

FULLY RESOURCED COUNTERINSURGENCY

In the fall of 2009, President Obama rejected the implementation of a fully resourced counterinsurgency campaign with an open-ended timeline in Afghanistan. His decision to commit an additional 30,000 troops was conditioned by the announced plan to begin their return home in July 2011, starting the transition to Afghan security forces taking charge of the conflict. Proponents of the fully resourced counterinsurgency effort argue – and may be correct – that, given enough time and resources, a large-scale counterinsurgency campaign could accomplish U.S. objectives in Afghanistan. These proponents are also likely correct that most other policy alternatives carry with them some greater risk to U.S. interests.[71] The Obama administration, however, is correct to evaluate the current strain on U.S. resources, the limited marginal benefits of the present approach and the competing global priorities for resources and military readiness. Given the steadily diminishing state of U.S. popular support for the war, the likelihood of finding support in the United States for additional troops significantly beyond the current horizon of 2014 is highly problematic.[72]

VI. A "RESPONSIBLE TRANSITION" PLAN

The commencement of a long-term strategy to support Afghanistan's effort to prevent that country's reemergence as an al Qaeda safe haven is itself a statement that the United States and its allies will remain in Afghanistan for many years to come, but to credibly adopt this approach, the United States must do so in a sustainable way. The United States and its allies must at once make an unequivocal commitment to remain strong players in the region and keep AQAM at bay while conserving U.S. and allied costs in lives and treasure. It is both a time-driven and conditions-based approach. Timelines for phases of the transition are presented below, but should be flexible enough to accommodate unexpected developments. The conditions for transition are based primarily on the number of trained ANSF and the Afghan government's willingness to deploy them in ways that support the shared Afghan and U.S. interest in defeating the Taliban resurgence – not simply on the situation on the ground in any given district or province. ANSF, with U.S. advisers in support, will ultimately be expected to take over combat operations from NATO forces in contested regions. This "combat transition" is not constrained by some necessity to set ideal conditions on the ground; it expects sustained combat led by Afghan security forces to follow. While the most dangerous zones are expected to transition last in this plan, U.S. residual forces will be weighted toward those areas to ensure the Afghan transition and sustained combat operations thereafter are successful. Thus the bulk of the population-centric counterinsurgency fight will over time cede to Afghan rather than U.S. and NATO troops. This new face of the war, with a much-reduced U.S. force presence working "by, with and through" Afghans, may also diminish the arguable effect of large international forces serving as a catalyst for mobilizing insurgents.

This strategy marks the logical next phase of today's U.S.-centric, troop intensive counterinsurgency approach. It will focus U.S. military power, intelligence assets and integrated U.S. soft power in ways that rebalance the resources and priorities. It enables Afghan forces, renews the focus of the most highly capable U.S. forces on al Qaeda and its allies and realigns relationships with Kabul and Islamabad. It brings into better balance sustained U.S. human and materiel costs with vital U.S. interests, while acknowledging greater risks to Afghanistan's central government and human rights – but far less than those that would accompany a Taliban return to power. This strategy tailors the right resources to the fight in ways that explicitly acknowledge the changed nature of the enemy, the war and U.S. strategic context for the next decade.

Concept of Operations

The overall concept of operations is to bring U.S. and allied military power from its high water mark of nearly 140,000 forces down to a smaller and more sustainable number while largely substituting Afghan National Security Forces trained and advised by the United States and its NATO allies into the counterinsurgency fight. Residual U.S. forces will have the dual mission of supporting and advising ANSF while focusing direct combat actions against al Qaeda and its allies' core capabilities, primarily through Special Operations Forces. COIN will primarily belong to the ANSF while CT will largely belong to the United States. Afghan security forces will take ownership of the fundamental mission of population security across the country, replacing the large numbers of U.S. and NATO conventional forces performing these tasks today. Over the course of this plan, this new division of labor will permit the withdrawal of the bulk of U.S. and NATO conventional forces directly engaged in COIN operations today as the ANSF assume those responsibilities.

Time Driven or Conditions Based?

Does this plan to draw down forces operate on a rigid timeline for transition to Afghan forces, or is it linked strictly to conditions of local success as a prerequisite for transition? Much rhetoric has highlighted that President Obama's current strategy of charting a transition to ANSF security responsibilities beginning in July 2011 will be tied to conditions on the ground. While the U.S. military prefers this approach because it accepts very little risk to the mission, its central flaw is that U.S. forces will be unable to ever transition in areas where combat may continue for years – potentially in large portions of the south and east. Under the current conditions-based approach, the transition to ANSF replacing U.S. forces could be deferred indefinitely if conditions are not met. In our estimation, it is likely that in certain areas, insufficient progress in both governance and security is likely to remain an enduring condition that no amount of time or application of practicable levels of U.S. resources will permanently alter. Thus, our combined time-driven, conditions-based approach recognizes the value of establishing a timeline for shifting lead responsibilities while fully recognizing that serious combat in many areas is likely to continue – and that a transition to trained Afghan forces taking on that primary combat role with Americans in support makes perfect sense. Rebalancing future U.S. commitments in Afghanistan while focusing squarely on the achievement of vital national interests beyond 2011 should guide future decisions to allocate forces and efforts.

These Afghan forces will be supported not only by a substantial U.S. advisory presence, but also by significant U.S. enablers, and they will be complemented on the battlefield by expanded U.S. and coalition SOF and intelligence assets.[73] These special operations forces are the centerpiece of a long-term U.S. commitment to continue the unfinished war to disrupt, dismantle and defeat AQAM across the region. The United States and NATO will reduce

their conventional force and headquarters (HQ) footprint across the country in responsible phases, both turning over sectors and bases to ANSF leadership and consolidating or eliminating unnecessary HQ and functions as the international military presence declines. The United States should also take the following additional steps:

- The United States should maintain its overall HQ in Kabul, linked closely to the U.S. embassy and sharing many capabilities with the U.S. country team – and ultimately shifting overall leadership of the combined U.S. civil and military effort over the long-term to the chief of mission (U.S. ambassador). The current headquarters of NATO's International Security Assistance Force would transition to a smaller U.S.-led coalition HQ by the end of the "Responsible Transition" period.
- The current NATO training HQ should shift to ANSF control once the ANSF reaches a target strength established by NATO Training Mission - Afghanistan, and will then yield full ownership of training to ANSF.[74]
- The U.S. operational warfighting HQ should shift to an Unconventional Warfare Joint Task Force focused on the long-term fight against AQAM in the region – not simply Afghanistan.[75] This HQ would form a close partnership with the ANSF military command and maintain close ties with the U.S. military support effort in Pakistan.
- Conventional U.S. forces remaining in Afghanistan should ultimately be limited to the core elements of the robust ANSF advisory and sustainment effort; several rapidly deployable Quick Reaction Forces (QRF) stationed at key locations available to react to unexpected crises or opportunities; a sizable theater reserve; an aviation brigade of lift and attack helicopters; and significant U.S. Air Force (USAF) strike and surveillance capabilities – all underpinned by a modest logistics base.

The evolution from today's force to this residual force would occur over 24-36 months, beginning in July 2011, and would see U.S. troop numbers reduced by approximately two-thirds; other NATO forces would begin to transition as early as January 2011 and ultimately drop in strength by 80 percent or more. Remaining NATO or coalition troop contributions would likely focus on ANSF trainers, selected enablers and SOF.

PHASE ZERO (JANUARY-JULY 2011): PREPARING FOR TRANSITION

This initial stage of the transition is primarily an assessment and preliminary transfer phase. The preliminary results of the "surge" and the new application of tactics focused on Kandahar and on pressuring the Taliban leadership through carefully targeted strikes over the fall and winter of 2010-2011 will become known. During this six-month period, NATO forces will begin their first turnovers of key areas of the country to ANSF, with portions of those NATO elements shifting into ANSF training missions or being redeployed to home countries. Likely candidates for transfer to Afghan security leadership and control are areas of northern and western Afghanistan, with elements of German, Italian and Spanish contingents thinning their forces and seeing partial redeployment or shift to new missions as ANSF take on greater roles in those areas. U.S. forces made available by these or other transitions to ANSF will be recommitted to other key locations in Afghanistan to continue operations through July 2011. Continued assessment of the effects of the surge will be ongoing.

PHASE ONE (JULY 2011-DECEMBER 2012): SHIFTING TO FOCUSED ADVISORY AND COUNTERTERRORISM OPERATIONS

The next phase of the transition concentrates on rapidly completing and solidifying the growth in quality and quantity of ANSF, as well as turning over significant portions of the Afghan battlespace to ANSF control. U.S. military efforts during this

phase will sustain both COIN and offensive kinetic operations against the enemy while ensuring that the full requirements for trainers and advisers for ANSF are met. By the end of this phase, the main effort for U.S. military operations in Afghanistan will shift from U.S. forces primarily conducting COIN-centered operations to U.S. forces advising and enabling ANSF to conduct a substantial portion of the COIN operations. The U.S. advisory effort becomes "Job One" and is refined and empowered by substantial enablers and USAF manned and unmanned capabilities. Other NATO forces will continue to thin and ultimately turn over their sectors to Afghan control, with a likely sequence of Regional Command-North (Germans) based in Mazar-e-Sharif and Regional Command-West (Italians and Spanish) based in Herat, completing these transitions as early as the spring of 2012. Regional Command-Southwest (U.S. Marine Corps) will consolidate in early 2012 once again with Regional Command-South to reduce HQ requirements. The final Regional Commands (RC) to transition to ANSF control will be RC-East and RC-South in sequence by the end of 2012. The United States will gradually consolidate most of its enablers of aviation, intelligence, logistics and other combat support power at two primary hubs, Bagram and Kandahar, while maintaining selected key enablers forward based along the border region in the east and southeast. Today's U.S. force levels of 100,000 would draw down by one-third to one-half during this phase.

PHASE TWO (JANUARY 2013-JULY 2014): MOVING TO RESIDUAL FORCE OPERATIONS

Full transition is completed during this window, with Afghan security forces assuming full leadership of operations by the summer of 2014. U.S. forces by this point will be fully reorganized into an unconventional warfare task force (UWTF) that would partner with friends and allies across the region, focusing on conducting combined and interagency intelligence, advisory and other programs deemed necessary to build and sustain long-term relationships to provide enhanced understanding and optimally guide military operations. A subordinate counterterrorist-joint task force (CT-JTF) focused on immediate day-to-day surgical operations, would remain as part of the UWTF to maintain constant pressure on AQAM and its close allies across the region and clearly demonstrate U.S. resolve to continue addressing the most dangerous threat to the United States in the region. U.S. general purpose force advisers will continue to operate with Afghan forces, but they will begin in early 2013 to depart from the north and west of Afghanistan, passing full independent operations capability over to the ANSF in those regions. By the summer of 2014, U.S. general purpose force advisers will be found in limited numbers in Afghan units in the south and east, with those units transitioning to longer-term independent operations in partnership with U.S. SOF in the residual force and taking full command of RC-East and RC-South. U.S. enablers will adjust to levels required to support ANSF and U.S. SOF operations targeting AQAM. By the end of this phase, U.S. forces will draw down and reconfigure to a sustainable residual force presence of 25,000-35,000 troops.[76]

Spoilers: Potential Obstacles to Success

All plans are subject to unexpected turns of events. The volatility of this region and its diverse actors argue for a cautious outlook on the prospects for the success of any plan, no matter how well founded. A number of potentially disruptive events merit discussion.

TERROR ATTACK ON THE UNITED STATES FROM PAKISTAN

Several abortive terror attacks on the United States over the last year have originated from individuals trained in Pakistan. The possibility of a future attack of similar origin cannot be discounted. If such an event were to occur, it would be a game-changer for U.S. policy. Were an attack to cause

casualties on U.S. soil, it would enrage Americans and likely force a significant government response – regardless of the administration in power. A significant U.S. strike against known or suspected terrorist enclaves in Pakistan would be a realistic possibility.[77] The repercussions of such an event in Pakistan and on U.S. efforts in Afghanistan are difficult to judge, but they might well entail greater U.S. military efforts both in Afghanistan and potentially in Pakistan. Unquestionably, a dramatic change in Pakistan's internal support for terrorist groups inside its territory would have to be immediately evident to preclude a very severe series of U.S. counteractions. The probability of the United States entering into an adversarial relationship with Pakistan in the aftermath of an attack on U.S. soil would be significant, at least in the short term.

AN ADVERSARIAL PAKISTAN

The potential for Pakistan to react angrily to increased public and private pressure from the United States is real. This reaction could range from closing NATO supply routes (as occurred in September 2010) to the denial of intelligence cooperation and support for drone operations inside Pakistan. In each of these cases, prudent planning should be done now by U.S. military and intelligence organizations that currently rely on Pakistani support. Critical logistics should be stockpiled in Afghanistan against potential shortages, and backup plans made to increase throughput on the so-called Northern Distribution Network and by air delivery. As U.S. forces decline in substantial numbers, the heavy logistical reliance on Pakistani routes should be reduced or eliminated while more secure northern access should be used for the much smaller residual force. Pakistan's chokehold on this aspect of U.S. operations should be removed. In the realm of drone operations and intelligence cooperation, alternate plans should be made to substitute Afghan locations for basing inside Pakistan (if news reports are accurate), as well as to substitute longer-loitering drones that can operate at great distances from their bases. Intelligence resources should also be directed toward developing agents and networks independent of the ISI in order to provide long-term access to information.[78] Once again, the United States holds extraordinarily powerful financial leverage over Pakistan, and it should not hesitate to use this influence should it become necessary.

A RESURGENT TALIBAN

As the United States and NATO begin to draw down and consolidate bases and military forces in Afghanistan, the Taliban could take advantage of this reduced footprint to launch attacks aimed at inflicting heavy casualties or a decisive defeat on international forces. This eventuality will remain throughout the projected period of the entire transition, and it will be a factor that the SOF-heavy residual force will have to remain vigilant against over the long term. That said, the potent combination of U.S. firepower – to include rapidly responsive air assets – and greatly improved technical and human intelligence will mitigate this risk. Prudent planning by military commanders on the ground will minimize the vulnerability of the force as it negotiates this transition, and alertness and caution in navigating this period of risk will minimize the dangers. Needless to say, the role and effectiveness of U.S.-advised Afghan security forces in taking on the Taliban threat will be critical to assess and monitor during the transition. Finally, the extension of the "clock" to 2014 for substantial numbers of U.S. forces, coupled with the reality of an enduring long-term U.S. presence, will likely impose a dramatic psychological toll on Taliban resilience.

ANSF FAILURE

One key distinction between the U.S. transition to Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) leadership in 2007-2008 and this "Responsible Transition" strategy in Afghanistan is the state of the insurgency in

Unlike many of the major wars the United States has fought over the last century, the war in Afghanistan is unlikely to have a well-defined end with clear winners and losers.

each country. In Iraq, one could argue that the insurgency was broken before the military lead was turned over from U.S. forces to the ISF. In the next few years in Afghanistan, it seems far less likely that the same conditions will hold true – particularly given the Taliban's external sanctuary in Pakistan. Thus, the ANSF may find itself in heavy fighting with the Taliban, the outcome of which cannot be judged at this time. If, however, the ANSF proved unable to confront this threat – even with U.S. advisers and their powerful enablers – the security situation for remaining U.S. forces executing their drawdown or, later, those in residual force mode could become untenable.

This situation would present the United States with perhaps its most difficult dilemma. If this were to occur, the United States should take two steps to mitigate ANSF failure. First and most important, Pakistan should be given an unequivocal démarche that insists on Pakistani action to stop the Taliban effort or face U.S. direct intervention against Taliban sanctuaries and other associated terrorist targets inside Pakistan. Second, as is the case today, the United States should not hesitate to employ the full array of its precision firepower to destroy Taliban forces on the offensive attempting to overrun U.S. or ANSF outposts. Ultimately, however, the United States will have to decide if its military footprint in Afghanistan is tenable with an ANSF unable to match the Taliban. The ultimate fallback option in the event of this development might be basing the core elements of the residual force in northern Afghanistan locations well beyond the effective reach of substantial Taliban forces. Even in the most pessimistic scenarios, the ethnic alignment in northern Afghanistan will make that part of the country unsustainable for Taliban encroachment, especially in the face of residual U.S. and Afghan military capabilities. Robust base infrastructure exists today near Mazar-e-Sharif that could accommodate residual U.S. force basing and sustained CT missions under this worst-case "retrenchment and enclave" scenario.

Success and Endgame

Unlike many of the major wars the United States has fought over the last century, the war in Afghanistan is unlikely to have a well-defined end with clear winners and losers. The long-term residual U.S. force presence is also not likely to be large or to operate under largely peaceful conditions. One of the legacies of the September 11th attacks will be a long-term U.S. presence in Afghanistan. The citizens of the United States realize that the post-September 11th world demands some Americans – most often intelligence operatives and Special Operations Forces – to be engaged in wars fought in the shadows from remote corners of the globe. The effective protection of the United States from those who would do it grave harm demands no less a price – a vigilance that proactively works to contain, disrupt and dismember terrorist organizations that target the United States and its citizens around the globe.

VII. THE RESIDUAL FORCE

U.S. military forces in Afghanistan will dramatically change in size, composition and mission by mid-2014. In contrast with today's mission, with tens of thousands of GPFs conducting a nationwide counterinsurgency effort, the military command will shift to an unconventional warfare-centric force organized to fight a sustained irregular war leveraging asymmetric means.[79] This mission will be organized into a clandestine element led by U.S. and allied intelligence operatives (not detailed in this report); a special operations component focused on strikes and "kill/capture" raids as well as raising, advising and, where needed, leading locally recruited security and strike forces; information and civil military support; and a much smaller conventional force dedicated to training and advising the Afghan National Army (ANA) and a select gendarmerie-style police force.[80] Owing to its unique unconventional nature, this force should habitually be commanded by a three-star military officer with extensive SOF background.

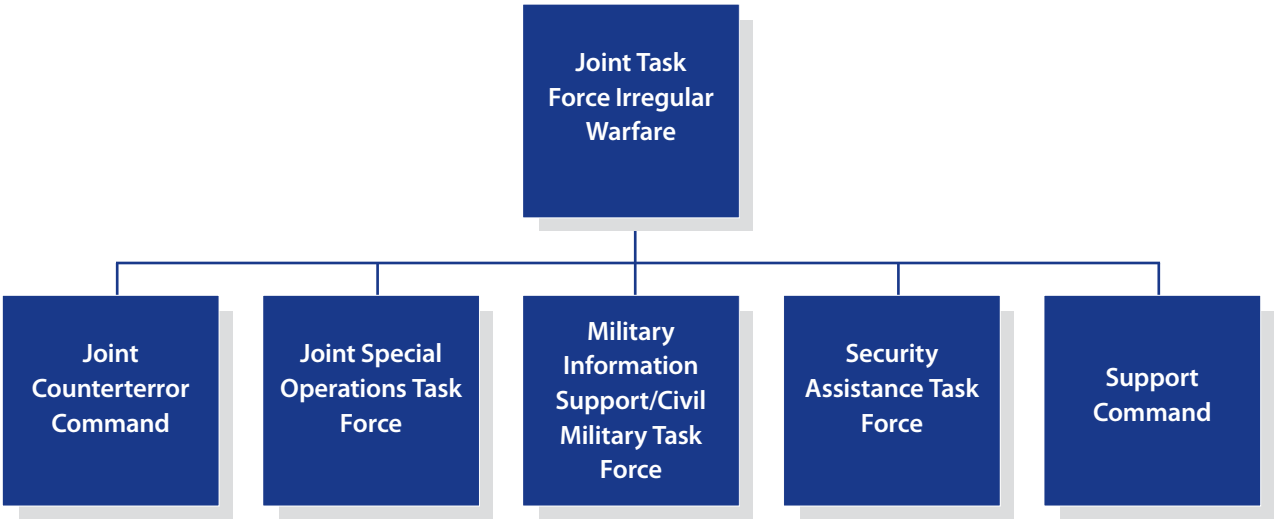
Force Composition

The U.S. components of this new unconventional task force with supporting enablers will eventually comprise 25,000-35,000 troops arrayed across a diverse set of military capabilities. NATO and coalition nations are expected to contribute up to an additional 5,000-10,000 trainers and SOF. After fully transitioning in 2014, the recommended residual force will require U.S. military expenditures in Afghanistan closer to approximately 25-30 billion dollars per year – roughly 75 percent less than the Department of Defense will spend during fiscal year 2011 – according to Congressional Budget Office projections.[82]

Command and Control: Today's multi-layered headquarters structures will be largely eliminated and turned over to Afghan leadership. The overall HQ must remain in Kabul and will likely transition from a NATO HQ to a U.S.-led coalition linked closely to the U.S. embassy. During the early phases, it would host two subordinate headquarters of much-reduced size. The first will have a training mission derived from a downsized NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan dedicated to sustained (if limited) oversight of ANSF training. This training HQ will eventually be eliminated and turned over to Afghan control. A second operational HQ will be built as Joint Task Force Irregular Warfare (JTFIW) based on the model of an unconventional warfare task force.[83] This JTFIW will eventually become the senior HQ for the U.S. coalition effort in Afghanistan during the final phase of the transition in 2014.

Special Operations Forces: The phased transition will create even greater demands for U.S. SOF, in numbers and duration. In many ways, this will become a SOF-led unconventional conflict – and by 2014, U.S residual forces will be partnered with a much stronger ANSF, and face a weakened Taliban and a weaker AQAM in Afghanistan.[84] U.S. SOF requirements will center around one (reinforced) or two regular Special Forces (SF) Groups comprising six battalions and able to deploy up to 60 SF 12-man "Alpha detachments." This substantial force represents nearly 20 percent of operational SF teams worldwide and will place a long-term demand on this force, both active and reserve. Their role would include sustaining raid operations focused on hunting insurgent groups, but now be expanded to unconventional warfare tasks centered around raising, training and, where needed, leading local Afghan security forces that will serve as adjuncts to the ANSF, particularly in remote areas along the border and in mountainous regions of the south and east. These local forces will serve both area security and offensive roles to fight Taliban in regions often inaccessible to ANSF or NATO forces today.

Joint Task Force Irregular Warfare (UWTF)



The ability to place a SOF-led or SOF-centric JTF on the ground for command of a theater campaign when SOF competencies – such as in addressing irregular threats and challenges – are central to mission accomplishmentprovides the nation enhanced flexibility in operating across today's security landscape.[81]

Other SOF comprising special mission units and their associated forces will continue to play robust sustained roles of similar scope and reach as their current efforts. These units have the primary "direct action" or strike/raid role focused on killing and capturing key enemy leaders and destroying their organizational infrastructure.

General Purpose Forces: The bulk of the phased transition force drawdown will be accomplished by the reduction of both GPF that today perform direct clear, hold and build COIN tasks and their logistical support structures. Residual GPF will be devoted to two to three battalion-sized QRFs, a brigade (minus) as theater reserve, and an initially extensive corps of advisers devoted to mentoring ANSF in the field.[85] The United States will seek to replace most if not all U.S. forces engaged in the basic training of ANSF in garrison with NATO residual forces, Afghan trainers and, if necessary, contracted instructors.

Enablers: Key U.S. capabilities will remain in Afghanistan and offshore to support U.S. forces and their Afghan counterparts in the sustained unconventional war to follow. The United States will maintain a reinforced combat aviation brigade based at Bagram, Kandahar and selected large forward operating bases (FOBs). This helicopter brigade will deploy the full range of attack, scout, lift and medical evacuation aircraft essential in the support of dispersed forces. Special operations aviation components will also remain as key components to the SOF forces which, along with the Afghan National Army, will be the primary "customers" of all aviation resources in country. The U.S. Air Force will maintain an extensive array of unmanned drones and intelligence assets, as well as limited fighter/attack aircraft to fully resource the demands of the Residual Force and its ANA counterparts. Some USAF capabilities may be based in nearby countries, as is the case today. When feasible, "reachback" intelligence capabilities from beyond the theater will also be leveraged.

Basing

In implementing "Responsible Transition," the United States will move away from an expansive array of bases across Afghanistan – some newly built in 2009-2010 – into a core set of sustainable installations capable of supporting a prolonged low level of unconventional war. This footprint will mirror the limited U.S. basing footprint of 2005, supporting a then-20,000 soldier U.S. presence. Bagram airfield (BAF) will revert to the principal U.S. base in Afghanistan, although base "ownership" would gradually transition to the ANSF. This airfield would be the primary base for U.S. air assets remaining in support of unconventional warfare operations and include attack and lift helicopters, medevac and drones. Kandahar airfield will be fully operated by the ANSF while hosting a limited number of U.S. enablers, including similar outlays of drones and aviation assets. The wide range of other bases across the country will transition in deliberate fashion to ANA ownership or be closed down as appropriate. U.S. residual forces – especially SOF and advisers – will continue to operate with their Afghan counterparts from many of these bases to maintain pressure on the enemy and remain "plugged in" to intelligence sources. Smaller bases in the east and south will continue to operate as FOBs that will be owned by ANSF, advised by Americans, with integrated SOF unconventional warfare units. The reach of these small bases across the length of the contested border region will implant long-term access to intelligence and security capabilities essential to prosecuting a low-level conflict of extended duration. No one should expect al Qaeda and its most committed allies to quit the field and fold up their operations under any conceivable scenario.

U.S. Enablers

U.S. enablers – drones, attack and support helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft, intelligence staff, logistics and medical assets – will remain in position at selected bases within Afghanistan to provide high-end asymmetrical response capabilities to U.S. unconventional warriors and their Afghan counterparts. This effort will support a sustained special operations mission aimed at long-term disruption of an intractable extremist threat. U.S.-sponsored irregular forces and their intelligence agents would have unfettered reach across the region in partnership with neighboring nations where possible and acting independently when U.S interests demand it. Al Qaeda and its hard core of allies will never be "negotiated off the battlefield." Bluntly speaking, they must be destroyed.

Al Qaeda and its hard core of allies will never be "negotiated off the battlefield." Bluntly speaking, they must be destroyed.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Establishing a hard and fast timeline for implementing a new strategy in Afghanistan is less important than securing vital U.S. national interests. Today, ambiguity regarding ultimate U.S. plans leaves key players uncertain, driving them toward making worst-case assessments or hedging their bets. When making decisions, actors in the region ask: "What will this decision look like the day after the Americans are gone?" This deep uncertainty undercuts the ability of the United States to build relationships of trust with Afghans and Pakistanis alike, and it feeds the insurgent narrative that "the Americans may have all the wristwatches, but we have all the time." It undermines U.S. interests. And in the aftermath of a major increase of U.S. troops over the past two years, serious doubts remain over whether this massive conventional presence in Afghanistan has any salient effect on the efforts of al Qaeda based largely next door in Pakistan.

After more than nine years at war, an indefinite troop presence of nearly 140,000 in Afghanistan in the midst of a staggering global debt and financial crisis is neither supported by NATO publics nor a sound strategy choice given an unruly world of disparate threats. In an era of shifting threats and fewer resources, the large-scale military and financial commitment to fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan while al Qaeda finds shelter in Pakistan no longer passes the "common sense test" for many Americans. NATO troop-contributing nations, too, are primed to move responsibly but expeditiously to a much-reduced commitment. The November 2010 Lisbon conference began to lay out that timeline.

In this context, we propose the most responsible next steps given unattractive circumstances. Our recommended strategy builds on President Obama's December 2009 speech and subsequent policy choices.

There is no guarantee of success. Nonetheless, walking away from this region – as the United States did in the 1990s – is an option that holds too great a risk for the United States and its NATO allies. The global core of al Qaeda central remains in the Afghan-Pakistan border area. Leaving the region entirely would remove the strong pressure that has severely limited al Qaeda's success in recent years. That outcome can be achieved in ways that more carefully conserve U.S. and allied resources, most especially lives.

Al Qaeda, the perpetrators of the September 11th attacks, remains a tenacious and resilient enemy that continues to threaten U.S. lives and interests, as well as the lives and interests of friends and allies around the world. The United States has no choice but to stiffen its resolve and disrupt, dismantle and defeat this shadowy network. The United States and its allies also must continue to take the war to the enemy. The proposed "Responsible Transition" allows the United States to focus its resources on countering transnational terrorist groups based in the Afghanistan and Pakistan region while securing vital national interests. It also firmly assigns responsibility to the ANSF, backed by U.S. capabilities, for the continued fight against the Taliban, an enemy that most directly threatens the Afghan people and their nation.

While the United States and its allies will surely endure political squabbling over the trajectory of this transition, the Afghan people will face a much more serious outcome – the prospect of more years of war, in addition to the three decades they have already endured. For the first time, though, not only will the duration of the international commitment be clearer, but the Afghan people will be carefully and deliberately given direct responsibility and ownership of this fight for their future. Afghanistan remains their nation to win or lose – and 30,000 Taliban cannot dictate the future of 30 million Afghans

if the people of Afghanistan commit to winning this battle.[86]

For the United States and its allies, with the July 2011 marker looming on the calendar, it is time to firmly commit to what will come next. The future steps must reflect both a changing global context for the United States and its allies in the wake of the global financial crisis, but also recognize the essential requirement for an enduring and thus sustainable commitment to the region surrounding the Hindu Kush. This strategy does so.

It is time to rebalance U.S. priorities and reshape U.S. options with a view toward both the real threats to the United States and the growing set of challenges it faces. Implementing a new phase of the Obama administration's strategy over the 24-36 months commencing in July 2011 establishes a responsible path from the current resource-intensive military operation to a sustainable, longer-term unconventional one that is focused on protecting the United States, its citizens and its allies. To prevail in this war against an enemy that has adapted significantly since the September 11th attacks, the United States and its allies must tailor their methods and adapt in ways that leverage strengths while reducing and protecting against vulnerabilities. Moving responsibly toward a sustainable unconventional warfare strategy focused on the most dangerous enemies of the United States is the right decision at the right time.

ENDNOTES

1. Dan Murphy, "Kabul Conference: NATO Withdrawal from Afghanistan by 2014?" *Christian Science Monitor* (19 July 2010), http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2010/0719/Kabul-Conference-NATO-withdrawal-from-Afghanistan-by-2014. See also Yaroslav Trofimov, Adam Entous and Stephen Fidler, "Obama Rebukes Karzai Over Demands to Curb Raids," *Wall Street Journal* (21 November 2010).

2. The term "wicked problem" was developed by Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber in "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences* 4 (1973): 155-169.

3. "Report on Afghanistan and Pakistan, September 2009," Interagency Report to Congress.

4. See "White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan," 27 March 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/afghanistan_pakistan_white_paper_final.pdf; and "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan," 1 December 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan.

5. The differences between the March 2009 white paper and the strategic objectives outlined in the December 2009 speech are apparent in the documents referenced above. An "insider's" account of the policy debates that preceded the December 2009 speech can be found in Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

6. The current budget deficit has been a divisive political issue, leading many to call for cutting discretionary spending, including defense and foreign assistance. See Thom Shanker and Christopher Drew, "Pentagon Faces Growing Pressures to Trim Budget," *The New York Times,* 22 July 2010. See also Glen Greenwald, "The Sanctity of Military Spending," *Salon* (26 January 2010), http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/2010/01/26/defense; and Adam Graham-Silverman, "Foreign Aid on Chopping Block as Lawmakers Confront Deficit," *The Fiscal Times* (30 June 2010), http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/Issues/Budget-Impact/2010/06/30/Foreign-Aid-on-Chopping-Block-as-Lawmakers-Confront-Deficit.aspx.

7. Barbara Sude, "Al-Qaeda Central," New America Foundation, (February 2010), http://www.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/sude.pdf.

8. A variety of officials and experts have questioned the security and stability of Pakistan's nuclear infrastructure.. The presence of powerful insurgencies and terrorist groups such as al Qaeda that routinely target Pakistan's security forces and its political leadership, as evidenced by the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, threatens the enduring stability of the state. In addition, the legacy of the A.Q. Khan global illicit nuclear supply chain highlights the potential global threat that Pakistan's nuclear weapons pose to the United States and its interests. See Jeffrey Lewis, "Managing the Danger from Pakistan's Nuclear Stockpile," New America Foundation (November 2010). See also Paul K. Kerr and Mary Beth Nikitin, "Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons: Proliferation and Security Issues," Congressional Research Service (12 June 2009), http://www.usembassy.it/pdf/other/RL34248.pdf. For a detailed account of the A.Q. Khan network, see Gordon Corera, *Shopping for Bombs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

9. This study's determination of U.S. interests in Afghanistan and the region are similar in scope to that held by the Afghanistan Study Group. The strategy outline in our report differs, however, in the proposed means to secure those vital interests, most notably, in the commitment of military and security forces beyond 2011-2012 the time frame of the study. See Afghanistan Study Group, "A New Way Forward: Rethinking U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan" (9 September 2010): 4, http://www.afghanistanstudygroup.org/read-the-report/.

10. An additional 40,000 allied troops also participate in NATO/Intenational Security Assistance Force missions in Afghanistan, but they are often constrained in their activities by varying quality and national restrictions on what they can and cannot do operationally.

11. Richard A. Oppel, "Afghan Plan on Transfer of Security Gets Support," *The New York Times* (19 July 2010).

12. For more on the way in which Afghans have interpreted the president's deadline as well as the way they have interpreted U.S. and allied combat operations since 2009, see the discussion between Eric Gaston, Michael Semple and Andrew Exum at the Open Society Institute on 7 October 2009, http://fora.tv/2010/10/07/Trust_Deficit_Perceptions_and_Policy_in_Afghanistan.

13. Oppel, "Afghan Plan on Transfer of Security Gets Support."

14. Mike Dorning, "Obama Loses Support in Poll as Joblessness Prompts Growing U.S. Discontent," *LA Times Blog* (12 October, 2010), http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-10-12/obama-losing-supporters-in-poll-as-joblessness-prompts-voters-discontent.html.

15. See "Defence Review: Cameron Unveils Armed Forces Cuts," *BBC News* (19 October 2010), http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11570593. See also "Conservative Party Conference: Forces Budget Will Fall below NATO Minimum," *The Daily Telegraph* (7 October 2010), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/conservative/8047477/Conservative-Party-Conference-forces-budget-will-fall-below-Nato-minimum.html.

16. Oya Celasum and Geoffrey Keim, "The U.S. Federal Debt Outlook: Reading the Tea Leaves," International Monetary Fund Working Paper (March 2010),http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2010/wp1062.pdf.

17. Congressional Budget Office, "The Budget and Economic Outlook: Fiscal Years 2010 to 2020" (January 2010), http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/108xx/doc10871/01-26-Outlook.pdf. See also "CBO Report: Debt Will Rise to 90% of GDP," *The Washington Times* (26 March 2010).

18. Congressional Budget Office, "The Budget and Economic Outlook: Fiscal Years 2010 to 2020."

19. "Operation Enduring Freedom," iCasualties.org., accessed 7 November 2010.

20. Casualties, Operation Enduring Freedom, as of 1 November 2010, 10 a.m. E.D.T., http://www.defense.gov/news/casualty.pdf. See also "Operation Enduring Freedom, iCasualties.org , as of 1 November 2010, http://icasualties.org/oef/.

21. Carl von Clausewitz makes clear the only true "means" in war is combat itself (*On War*, Book I, Chapter II; trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993]). The United States and its allies are waging combat through both non-kinetic and kinetic lines of operation in Afghanistan with considerable but limited resources. A central aim of this paper is to determine how the United States and its allies can engage in combat in the most economical way possible given those limited resources and other U.S. and allied interests and objectives elsewhere.

22. Christine Fair, "What Are India's Interests in Afghanistan?" Foreign Policy AfPak Channel (26 October 2010).

23. Michael Ronaldson, "Withdrawal Will Pitch Afghanistan Back Into the Dark Ages," *The Australian* (28 October 2010), http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/withdrawal-will-pitch-afghanistan-back-into-dark-ages/story-e6frg6zo-1225944419311.

24. Jeremy Page, "Afghanistan Copper Deposits Worth $88 Billion Attract Chinese Investors," *Times* (London) (15 May 2008), http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article3941656.ece.

25. In 2009, India completed the development of the 150 million dollar road connecting Chahbahar in Iran to Afghanistan, as part of a larger 1.1 billion dollar development initiative. See "Afghanistan, India Open Strategic Road to Iran," *Dawn* (23 January 2009).

26. Ahmed Rashid, "The Road to Kabul Runs through Kashmir," *Foreign Policy* (10 November 2010), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/11/10/The_Road_to_Kabul_Runs_Through_Kashmir.

27. See Steve Coll, "The Paradoxes of al Qaeda," testimony for Senate Armed Services Committee (27 January 2010).

28. See Ashley Tellis, "Pakistan's Mixed Record on Anti-Terrorism," Council on Foreign Relations (6 February 2008); and Katherine Hubbard, "Strategic Concerns, Historical Ties Make Pakistan Unwilling to Take On Haqqani," Center for Strategic and International Studies (4 February 2010).

29. Thomas Ruttig, "The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity," in Antonio Guistozz, ed., *Decoding the New Taliban* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

30. Helene Cooper, . "Allies in War, But the Goals Clash," *The New York Times* (9 October 2010).

31. Claudi Franco, "The Tehrik-E Taliban Pakistan," in Guistozzi, *Decoding the New Taliban*: 280-287.

32. Andrea Elliot, "Militant's Path from Pakistan to Times Square," *The New York Times* (22 June 2010).

33. Ashley Tellis, "Bad Company – Lashkar E-Tayyiba and the Growing Ambition of Islamist Militancy in Pakistan," testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs (11 March 2010).

34. Somini Sengupta, "Dossier Gives Details of Mumbai Attacks," *The New York Times* (7 January 2009). According to Jeffrey Lewis, Pakistani nuclear weapons are at most risk of unauthorized use in times of high tensions or during overt conflict between India and Pakistan. The LET attack on Mumbai increased the risk of conflict between the two states, and by default increased the opportunity for unauthorized use of a nuclear device. See Lewis, "Managing the Danger from Pakistan's Nuclear Stockpile.".

35. Haider Ali Hussein Mullick, "Al Qa'eda and Pakistan: Current Role and Future Considerations," Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (October 2010): 7-9.

36. Peter Bergen, "Afghanistan and Pakistan: Understanding a Complex Threat Environment," New America Foundation (4 March 2009), http://www.newamerica.net/publications/resources/2009/afghanistan_and_pakistan_understanding_complex_threat_environment.

37. Gretchen Peters, "Crime and Insurgency in the Tribal Areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*. Edited by Don Rassler. (October 2010): 4-8.

38. David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 34-38.

39. Amy Balasco, "The Costs of Iraq, Afghanistan and Other Global War on Terror Operations since 9/11," Congressional Research Service (2 September 2010).

40. Transparency International, "Global Corruption Report 2009." (Afghanistan ranks 176 out of 180 countries in 2009).

41. Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance," Congressional Research Service (14 September 2010): 12-18.

42. Astri Suhrke is a political scientist at the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Bergen, Norway. The figures that follow are taken from a presentation delivered at a Wilton Park Conference in March 2010 and are cited with her permission.

43. Colin Cookman and Caroline Wadhams, "Governance in Afghanistan: Looking Ahead to What We Leave Behind," Center for American Progress (May 2010): 26.

44. In some cases, aid has had a positive effect on how the Afghan government is perceived at the district and provincial levels. Research has shown, however, that this effect has tended to be both short term and noncumulative. See Jan Böhnke, Jan Koehler and Christoph Zürcher, "Assessing the Impact of Development Cooperation in North East Afghanistan, 2005-2009," Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany), http://www.bmz.de/en/service/infothek/evaluation/BMZEvaluierungsberichte/index.html.

45. Andrew Exum highlights the challenges of improved relations with President Karzai. Andrew Exum, "Leverage," Center for a New American

Security (May 2010): 14 and 18. This report recognizes the inherent tensions in focusing on local governance and maintaining good relations with Karzai.

46. Jake Cusack and Eric Malmstrom "Afghanistan's Willing Entrepreneurs: Supporting Private-Sector Growth in the Afghan Economy," Center for a New American Security.

47. Peter Baker and Rod Nordland, "U.S. Plan Envisions Path to Ending Afghan Combat," *The New York Times* (14 November 2010).

48. This is not the first time an attempt to centralize governance in Afghanistan has met with failure. Thomas Barfield notes that Abdul Rahman Khan attempted to replace an older decentralized system of government in 1880 with disastrous effects for his successors. Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History (*Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010). David Edwards also tells the story of the reign of Abdur Rahman Khan and the way in which his attempts to centralize power generated much animosity among Afghans. David B. Edwards, *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), ch. 3.

49. For the text of the Bonn agreement, see http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/afghan/afghan-agree.htm.

50. "Behind Taliban Lines: Interview with Gilles Dorronsoro," *Frontline* (23 February 2010), http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/talibanlines/policy/.

51. John A. Nagl, Andrew Exum and Ahmed A. Humayun, "A Pathway to Success in Afghanistan: The National Solidarity Program," Center for a New American Security (16 March 2009).

52. Caroline Wadhams and Colin Cookman, "Keeping Karzai's Feet to the Fire," *Foreign Policy* (21 July 2010).

53. Katzman, "Afghanistan:" 21.

54. "Roundtable Discussion: The Future of Governance in Afghanistan," United States Institute for Peace (3 October 2008).

55. This text box is drawn from a previous version written as online commentary for *Foreign Policy* magazine. Andrew Exum, "Smoke and Mirrors in Kabul," Foreign Policy.com (22 October 2010), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/22/smoke_and_mirrors_in_kabul.

56. Stephen Biddle. "Is There a Middle Way?" *The New Republic*, (20 October 2009).

57. The dynamics of U.S. support for Pakistan are outlined in Richard L. Armitage, Samuel R. Berger and Daniel S. Markey, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), "Independent Task Force Report No. 65, U.S. Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan": 44-55. LTG David W. Barno (Ret.) contributed to the report but submitted a dissenting opinion. The CFR Task Force authors recommend continued U.S.-Pakistan cooperation, as does this strategy, and cautions against increased tensions between the United States and its major non-NATO ally. This strategy supports the same goal, a sovereign Pakistan not host to or threatened by transnational terrorist organizations and in control of its territory and nuclear materials. We believe that careful pressure and clear communication of U.S. strategic interests in the region are essential to garnering effective partnership. The United States should continue to support Pakistani counterinsurgency operations and military and intelligence liaison relationships between the two countries.

58. See David Sanger and Eric Schmitt, "Pakistani Troops Linked to Abuses Will Lose Aid," *The New York Times* (21 October 2010); and David Sanger and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Offers Pakistan Army $2 Billion Aid Package," *The New York Times* (22 October 2010).

59. David W. Barno, discussion at U.S. Army War College with Larry Goodson. See also Bruce Riedel, "Pakistan and the Bomb," *Wall Street Journal* (30 May 2009).

60. Ahmed Rashid, "The Anarchic Republic of Pakistan" *The National Interest* (September/October 2010): 23.

61. Mark Mazzetti, Jane Perlez, Eric Schmitt and Andrew W. Lehren, "The Indian Embassy Bombing and ISI Complicity," *The New York Times* (25 July 2010). See also Stephen Biddle, "How to Gauge Karzai's U.S. Visit," Council on Foreign Relations (13 May 2010), http://www.cfr.org/publication/22121/how_to_gauge_karzais_us_visit.html.

62. Jayshee Bajoria, "The Strained U.S.-Pakistan Alliance," Council on Foreign Relations (22 October 2010).

63. Marian Leonardo Lawson, , Susan B. Epstein and Kennon H. Nakamura, "State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs: FY2011 Budget and Appropriations" (5 October 2010), http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41228.pdf.

64. Thom Shanker and Mark Landler, "NATO Ministers Endorse Wider Afghan Effort," *The New York Times* (23 October 2009).

65. Public polling data for Afghanistan is scarce. A comprehensive survey in winter of 2009-2010 concluded that 68 percent of Afghans support the U.S. presence. See ABC News, BBC, and ARD Poll (11-13 December 2009). http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/11_01_10_afghanpoll.pdf.

66. A 2008 conversation between LTG Barno and then Colonel Sean McFarland, U.S. Army, noted that in al-Anbar Province, Iraq, McFarland found that tribal sheiks refused to cooperate with U.S. forces until the message changed from "don't worry…" to a more enduring message and United States presence.

67. Many experts contend that the United States should pursue an offshore balancing strategy or other versions of counterterrorism while removing the U.S. footprint in Afghanistan. For examples of this position, see Robert Pape, "To Beat the Taliban, Fight from Afar," *The New York Times* (14 October 2009).

68. Using the database maintained by Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, we can determine non-military fatality rates from drone strikes fell between 2009 and 2010. See http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/drones.

69. See Austin Long, "Small Is Beautiful: The Counterterrorism Option in Afghanistan," *Orbis* 54: 2 (Spring 2010). See also Daniel Markey, with Richard Armitage and Samuel Berger, "U.S. Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan," Council on Foreign Relations (12 November 2010): 66. (Barno served as a member of the CFR report's Independent Task Force, but he dissented from

its recommendation on early and substantial reductions in U.S. forces.) The Responsible Transition plan differs from both documents noted above in asserting that a larger residual force is required to maintain effective training and counterterrorism capabilities.

70. See Frederick Kagan, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," testimony before the House Armed Services Committee (22 October 2009). An ANSF collapse would destabilize Pakistan rapidly. The collapse of any credible security force in Afghanistan would given anti-Pakistan insurgencies, such as the TTP, strategic depth to continually undermine the Pakistani writ of government.

71. See Stephen Biddle, "Is There a Middle Way?" *The New Republic* (20 October 2009).

72. Glen Greenwald, "Public Opinion and the War in Afghanistan," *Salon* (16 September 2010). http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/2010/09/16/afghanistan.

73. Enablers can include aircraft, both rotary and fixed wing, as well as intelligence and logistics support. See "Michael Vickers," *Defense News* (22 March 2010).

74. Thom Shanker and Eric Schmitt, "Obama Seeks Vastly Expanded Afghan Force to Help Stabilize the Nation," *The New York Times* (29 March 2009).

75. Michele Malvesti, "To Serve the Nation: U.S. Special Operations Forces in an Era of Persistent Conflict," Center for a New American Security (June 2010): 18.

76. Substantial portions of the design and missions for the UWTF are drawn from comments by Major General Geoff Lambert, USA (Ret.), former commander U.S. Army Special Forces Command.

77. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*: 108.

78. Ibid.: 367.

79. Definition of unconventional warfare based on JP 1-02: "A broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration, predominantly conducted through, with, or by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported and directed in varying degrees by an external source. It includes, but is not limited to, guerrilla warfare, subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and unconventional assisted recovery." See U.S. Joint Forces Command, "Irregular Warfare Special Study" (4 August 2006), http://merln.ndu.edu/archive/DigitalCollections/IrregWarfareSpecialStudy.pdf.

80. Austin Long has suggested a force structure for Afghanistan built around a core of special operations units and totaling in the vicinity of 13,000 operators and enablers. See Long, "Small Is Beautiful."

81. Malvesti, "To Serve the Nation."

82. Congressional Budget Office, "The Budget and Economic Outlook."

83. Malvesti, "To Serve the Nation:" 18.

84. Since 2005, the U.S. contingent has grown from only 20,000 U.S. troops to nearly 100,000 today, most of whom are now GPF and support troops.

85. These advisers would not simply be the troop-heavy "advise and assist" brigades deployed to Iraq, but a specially built force a fraction of the size.

86. The declaration "Afghanistan remains their nation to win or lose" is attributed to Abdullah Abdullah and can be found in David W. Barno, "The Afghan Tests Facing Petraeus," *Financial Times* (7 July 2010).

About the Center for a New American Security

The mission of the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) is to develop strong, pragmatic, and principled national security and defense policies. Building on the expertise and experience of its staff and advisors, CNAS aims to engage policymakers, experts and the public with innovative fact-based research, ideas, and analysis to shape and elevate the national security debate. A key part of our mission is to help inform and prepare the national security leaders of today and tomorrow.

CNAS is located in Washington, D.C., and was established in February 2007 by Co-founders Kurt M. Campbell and Michèle A. Flournoy. CNAS is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt nonprofit organization. Its research is nonpartisan; CNAS does not take specific policy positions. Accordingly, all views, positions, and conclusions expressed in this publication should be understood to be solely those of the authors.

Center for a New American Security
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 403
Washington, DC 20004

TEL 202.457.9400
FAX 202.457.9401
EMAIL info@cnas.org
www.cnas.org

Production Notes

Paper recycling is reprocessing waste paper fibers back into a usable paper product.

Soy ink is a helpful component in paper recycling. It helps in this process because the soy ink can be removed more easily than regular ink and can be taken out of paper during the de-inking process of recycling. This allows the recycled paper to have less damage to its paper fibers and have a brighter appearance. The waste that is left from the soy ink during the de-inking process is not hazardous and it can be treated easily through the development of modern processes.

STRONG, PRAGMATIC AND PRINCIPLED
NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICIES

1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 403
Washington, DC 20004

TEL 202.457.9400
FAX 202.457.9401
EMAIL info@cnas.org

www.cnas.org

ISBN 978-1-935087-39-7

Printed on Post-Consumer Recycled paper with Soy Inks