

*The Afghan-Pakistan Conflict: US
Strategic Options in Afghanistan*

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Executive Summary

The Afghan-Pakistan War has not been a “forgotten war,” but it has been a war that the US has allowed to slip from apparent victory into serious crisis. Initial military victories against Al Qaeda and Taliban forces have turned a war of political attrition. Tactical victories in Afghanistan have been offset by a steady increase in the levels of violence, casualties, and Taliban influence and control. At the same time, the war has spread to Pakistan and shifted Al Qaeda -- and the war’s center of gravity -- to another country

At this point in time, the Afghan and Pakistani governments, NATO/ISAF, and the US do not face a stalemate; they are losing the war. However, the situation may well be reversible. The Taliban, other Jihadist movements, and Al Qaeda in Pakistan remain relatively weak and unpopular movements. They are winning because the US and NATO/ISAF failed to react, to deploy the forces that were needed, to give proper priority and resources to building up Afghan forces, and allowed the administration of foreign aid to become a corrupt and horribly misadministered mess. They are winning because Afghanistan can hold elections but has not elected those who can govern. They are winning because Pakistan still does not see this struggle as its war, and has been caught up in a series of inept and corrupt governments focused on other issues.

They also are winning because the Afghan-Pakistan War has been a war in which the US has consistently failed to honestly assess the situation, failed to seek the level of support it needs from the Congress and American people, and failed to focus on the fact it is fighting a war and not carrying out post-conflict reconstruction. The US has consistently underreacted to the growth of the threat in providing troops and resources, and has failed to act decisively in putting pressure on the Afghan and Pakistani governments. It has also allowed the State Department and AID to make even more mistakes in shaping and administering aid than in Iraq, and done nothing to reform the massive failures and corruption in the international aid effort.

The question now is whether the US can change its strategy and react decisively enough to reverse this situation. There are six steps it needs to take:

- ***Shift from a failed focus on winning tactical clashes to implementing a strategy of “win, hold, build” that also offers security, development, and governance of the kind that will eliminate Taliban and Jihadist control and influence in the most critical areas and population centers of Afghanistan.*** The question is whether the US can find the added troops and aid workers who can function in a high threat environment, and is willing to allocate the necessary resources at a time of global financial crisis. So far, the answer may well be no.

It is far from clear that 17,000 troops will be enough, it is unclear where the added aid workers will come from or how they will function, there is no coherent plan or budget to provide the necessary financial resources, and it is unclear how the US can rationalize the awkward mix of military command structures and a failed effort to administer effective international aid. The US needs to provide a clear public plan to show what it expects its planned force levels to do, and whether they are adequate for the mission.

- ***Focus on improving Afghan governance rather than politics and elections.*** It is far from clear that even the most successful Afghan elections will do anything to bring better leadership and government. The end result is likely to be an inept and corrupt Afghan central government facing steadily more military pressure and now having to cope with an international financial crisis and growing problems in actually getting international aid.

The US cannot wait for improvements in governance at the provincial and local level. It is clear that it must not only seek to build Afghan capacity at the center, but in key provinces and districts, expanding the role of its Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and seeking whatever allied aid it can obtain. This does not mean undermining the central government but it does mean supplementing it. There is no time to wait for the central government to develop the level of competence it needs. Waiting for Karzai is like waiting for Godot; it is an empty exercise in existentialist futility.

- ***Provide adequate forces for the “win, hold, build” mission by strengthening Afghan national security forces (ANSF).*** This means staffing and funding an effort to develop the Afghan National Army as rapidly as possible, and supporting it in the field with adequate numbers of embedded combat advisors. It means giving warfighting priority over regular police functions and the “rule of law,” and strengthening the police – if the advisory resources can be found – so it can hold and provide local security in the face of Taliban and other Jihadist threats.

It means that ambitious force expansion programs – talking about major expansions of the Afghan forces to levels of 400,000 – must be tied to real world resources and goals and give priority to sustainable force quality over number bashing exercises in expanding force quantity. One thing is clear, providing 30-40% of the needed advisors and erratic funding without a credible long-term plan and consistency has helped make our efforts inadequate in the past and will do so in the future. It also means tying the development of local security to the overall development of governance and the ANSF so that they both aid in providing local security and do not become a rival source of power or tool for Taliban penetration.

- ***Carry out a ruthless reform of both the US and international economic aid effort,*** even if this means a major reorganization of US aid efforts, and deliberately embarrassing allied, UN, and NGO aid efforts where they are inept or corrupt. The US needs to apply the investigative and reporting methods used by the Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction (SIGIR) to all aspects of US aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to the aid efforts of our allies, the UN, and NGO.

The war cannot be won in either Afghanistan or Pakistan unless the US to demand effective aid plans that are related to real world wartime and development needs, and that are tied to transparent public audits and measures of effectiveness. The US needs to treat the effectiveness of aid as being of equal or greater importance in comparison to tactical warfighting. It needs to define the mission of the new Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) so no element of US, allied, UN, or private aid is a sacred cow, and so its mission includes Pakistan and a detailed assessment of the individual operations of each key element of the Afghan and Pakistan government. It needs to name names and directly assign responsibility. It

needs to highlight successes, but also areas of corruption, ineptness, and failure. Aid needs to be held to a new, ruthless, and demanding standard.

This same degree of realism needs to be applied to ambitious plans to recruit more civilian aid workers. No one needs well-intentioned, semi-qualified people who cannot operate in the field, and are not willing to risks. Warfighting requires civilians who can function in combat and high risk environments, go where they are really needed, and bring skills that are required in forward areas. The failure to understand this on the part of some who talk blithely about reserve forces, large-scale training programs, or bringing in people from outside defense is not an exercise in “smart power,” it is an exercise in operational stupidity.

The opposite is true of experimental concepts like creating Stability Brigades. US military forces can, and do, execute most of the “hold” and “build” mission. Some advocates of this concept, however, seek to make the force so specialized that it cannot act as a warfighting element and carry out the “win” side of the mission. This would be a critical mistake. There are no prospects that the US can ever count on having enough forces to provide adequate “win capability,” and the risk that conflicts will escalate and that soldiers performing the “hold” and “build” mission will come under broad or focused attack is simply too great. The US military will have to take on “civilian” roles throughout the duration of the Afghan-Pakistan conflict. Rhetoric aside, the war will be won or lost before anything like an adequate number of “civilian partners” will be available that can actually operate in armed national building as distinguished from post-conflict reconstruction.

- ***Make hard choices in dealing with Pakistan, and accept the fact that the most critical struggle is not in Afghanistan, but against Al Qa’ida and other sources of international terrorism in Pakistan and threats to Pakistan’s internal stability.*** The US may be fighting in Afghanistan but the key struggle is in another country. A Taliban victory in Afghanistan would almost certainly create a major new sanctuary for Al Qa’ida as well as empower every violent and extremist Jihadist movement in the world. It is far from clear, however, that any combination of US, Afghan, and NATO/ISAF efforts can win a long war of political attrition in Afghanistan if the Taliban, Al Qa’ida, Haqqani network, Hekmatyar movement, and other threats have a de facto sanctuary in Pakistan. It is also clear that a nuclear-armed Pakistan is far more of a strategic prize than Afghanistan, and that the conversion of Pakistan into a failed or Jihadist state would pose a more serious strategic threat to the US than the loss of Afghanistan.

The US may well never be able to deploy more than limited cadres of advisors, Special Forces, and systems like UCAVs to Pakistan. It may have to depend on the carrot of aid and the stick of political pressure – a series of options discussed in far more detail in a coming article in the *National Journal*. The fact remains, however, that what started as an Afghan War has spread in to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and Baluchi areas of Pakistan and that this is now the most critical center of gravity in a complex, multidimensional war.

Can the US make these changes in its strategy? Possibly. Such changes also scarcely eliminate the risks in fighting the war. There is still a serious risk of failure or the kind of

short to mid-term victory that does not achieve lasting stability, much less far more ambitious goals like development and true democracy. The odds of “victory in both Afghanistan and Pakistan are at best even –even if victory is defined narrowly as the destruction of the Taliban, Al Qa’ida, and Jihadist ability to operate in either country.

The odds of achieving more ambitious goals, such as post-conflict reconstruction and advanced development within the next decade in either Afghanistan or Pakistan are far less favorable negative. They are, however, scarcely hopeless if a government should emerge in either country capable of governing and truly serving the national interest. The fact that neither country has had such a government in more than three decades is discouraging, as are the forces that shape each country’s current failures in politics, development, and security. They are not, however, forces that cannot be overcome with time, patience, and consistent effort.

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Permitting the Rebirth of the Taliban and the Rise of Insurgent Threats

It is easy to focus on the very real blame that the Afghan and Pakistani governments must share in helping the al Qaeda and the Taliban recover. It is equally easy to focus on the many failings of our NATO/ISAF allies. It is time, however, that we took a long, hard look in the mirror. As was the case in Iraq, the US did not follow its military victories against Taliban military forces with effective stability operations or credible plans for nation building. From FY2002-FY2006, the US and NATO treated Afghanistan as an exercise in post conflict reconstruction that focused on creating and empowering an elected central government.

The Administration acted as if the war was nearly over from 2002-2005. The US, Britain, Canada, and other NATO countries joined the Northern Alliance and began bombing the Taliban in early October 2001 and providing aid and Special Forces to support an offensive by the Northern Alliance. The Taliban government was forced to leave Kabul and Jalalabad by November and was driven out of Kandahar by December 2001 – when it then dispersed to the countryside and Pakistan. US forces continued to pursue Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, but could not stop Al Qaeda from relocating its operations to the tribal areas in the western frontier or FATA areas in Pakistan.

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

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

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

The US-led effort failed in the economic dimension as well as the political and security dimensions. While outside countries provided major aid resources, this aid focused on medium and long-term efforts to develop a modern state rather than dealing with urgent needs. A fragmented combination of UN, NATO/ISAF, national, and NGO efforts took place

with little coordination. A grossly inadequate effort was made to effectively administer this aid, establish effective financial controls, and ensure it would reach into the countryside. Worse, it was directed towards building a Western-style secular state with mid and long term goals, rather than reaching the ordinary Afghan and providing services in the countryside.

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

Follow the Money: Failing to Resource the War

In short, the US made the same fundamental mistakes in the Afghan-Pakistan War that it later made in the Iraq War, but it did so while providing far fewer resources. It entered both conflicts without any plan to conduct meaningful stability operations, to take on nation-building tasks, and to fight a major insurgency. This grand strategic failure occurred in despite warnings from many experts in the US military, US State Department, US intelligence community, and outside experts. This failure was a major contributing factor in US and allied casualties in both wars as well as to the length, total cost, civilian casualties, collateral damage, and opportunity costs of both wars.

The US gave clear priority to the Iraq War. Work by Amy Belasco of the Congressional Research Service shows that the total budget authority for the Afghan War totaled \$171.1 billion for expenditures over eight fiscal years (counting the FY2009 bridge funds as part of FY2008) versus \$653.1 billion for six fiscal years of the Iraq War.ⁱⁱ If one considers other sources, US expenditures were four to five times higher on Iraq, and the same was true of levels of troops and contractors.

This, however, is only part of the story. There was a fundamental difference in the way that the Bush Administration reacted to the challenges it faced in Afghanistan after the initial moment of conventional victory in spite of the fact that Afghanistan was larger than Iraq, had a larger population, had an experienced opposition as large as al Qa'ida in Iraq and the Mahdi Army, presented far more serious operational challenges, and Pakistan presented far more serious problems than Iraq and Syria ever did.

In the case of Iraq, the US reacted almost immediately by making massive expenditures on US forces and economic aid in Iraq. Total funding rose from \$53.0 billion in FY2003 to \$75.9 billion in FY2004, \$85.5 billion in FY2006, \$133.6 billion in FY2007, and \$149.2 billion in FY2008. These figures radically differ in comparison to the case of Afghanistan. The US failed to resource its efforts against an increasingly serious insurgency as it developed from FY2002 through FY2006.

The US never committed anything approaching the aid resources necessary to support a “win, hold, build” strategy. This was in spite of the fact that Afghanistan – unlike Iraq – did not have substantial funds left over from the previous regime or a major ongoing stream of income from oil exports. At no point in the history of the Afghan war has the US made a

major aid commitment like it did in FY2004 in Iraq, when it committed \$19.5 billion in funds for foreign aid and diplomatic operations.

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

Creating a Power Vacuum that Empowered a Weak Opponent

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

These elements include forces under Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a leader who had fought the Soviets as well as many other Afghan rival movements, and who rejected the formation of the Karzai government. Hekmatyar now leads a group of Islamic extremist insurgents called the Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddinor (HIG) based in the FATA area and active in eastern Afghanistan.

They also include a faction is led by Mawlawi Jalaluddin Haqqani, who is sometimes credited with introducing suicide bombing to Afghanistan. Haqqani served as a Taliban military commander in the north of Kabul, and was responsible for Taliban operations in 2001 as well as the ethnic cleansing of local Tajik populations. He has also established bases in the FATA. He and his son, Sirajuddin Haqqani, are reported to have helped create a local group in Pakistan that has sometimes been called the Islamic Emirate of Waziristan and has several thousand Pakistani fighters. Hekmatyar and Haqqani are officially loyal to Omar and the Taliban.

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

The US and NATO/ISAF were slow to react to these shifts, and focused largely on the favorable outcome of military clashes inside Afghanistan – which were sporadic and which the US-NATO/ISAF forces always won. They were slow to realize that the Taliban and other Jihadists were steadily increasing its influence in the Pashtun areas in the countryside and was instead focusing on winning the battle for political influence and control. The US-NATO/ISAF forces were far too small to control the countryside and Afghan forces were only

effective where they had strong outside support – which was only possible for the larger US forces in Eastern Afghanistan.

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

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

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

Winning the Battles and Losing a War of Political Attrition

NATO still defeats the Taliban and other insurgent movements in virtually every clash, although it relies heavily on airpower to substitute for its lack of ground troops. Many of the national contingents do little more than defend their own bases. The end result is that the US and NATO/ISAF now talk of “stalemate,” and this seems more an exercise in propaganda and spin than an exercise in realism.

The Rising Intensity of the Threat

Various testimony and briefings show that the average monthly number of major incidents rose from only 50 in 2002 to 80 in 2003, 150 in 2005, 425 in 2006, and 566 in 2007. Suicide bombings rose from 1 in 2001 and 0 in 2002 to 2 in 2003, 6 in 2004, 21 in 2005, 123 in 2006, and 160 in 2007, and reached just over 1200 by the end of the first six months of 2008. The number of IEDs and roadside bombs rose from 22 in 2002 to 83 in 2003, 325 in 2004, 782 in 2005, 1,931 in 2006, and 2,615 in 2007, although the number of effective IED attacks remained low.

The number of attacks in the peak month in each year rose from 400 in 2005 to 800 in 2006 and 1,000 in 2007, and reach 1,000 in September 2008. Attacks causing at least one death rose from 366 in 2005 to 695 in 2006 and 892 in 2007, and the number killed, injured, or kidnapped rose from 1540 in 2005 to 3,557 in 2006 and 4,672 in 2007. Peak monthly US casualties (killed and wounded) rose from less than 20 from 2002-2003 to the mid-30s in 2004, 70 in 2005 and 2006, and 130 in 2007.

These figures rose by roughly third between 2007 and 2008. As the NATO/ISAF figures attached to this analysis show. During 2008, there was a 33% increase in kinetic events or military clashes, a 27% increase in indirect fire attacks, and a 67% increase in surface to air fire. The number of IED attacks – the most serious source of casualties, rose by 26% to 27%. There was a 119% increase in the number of attacks on Government of Afghanistan personnel, and 50% rise in kidnappings and assassinations. The number of suicide attacks dropped by 5%, but their lethality and skill increased and so did estimates of the number of suicide bombers in training. The number of NATO/ISAF deaths rose by 35% and civilian deaths rose by 40-46%.

The situation deteriorated further in late 2008 and early 2009, in part because the weather permitted more Jihadist movement. Clashes and attacks in the first two months of 2009 were twice the numbers as during the same period in 2008. They surged by 131% in the Eastern province of Kunar relative to the same month in 2008, highlighting the growth of the threat in the east as well as in the south.ⁱⁱⁱ This situation continued to deteriorate in March. US forces reported that "kinetic activity" in eastern Afghanistan increased by 68 percent this year compared to the same 80-or-so-day span last year. In the two provinces bordering Pakistan's Waziristan provinces, violence involving Western troops is up 90 percent, and attacks rose by 130% in the area across from the Mohmand and Bajaur tribal areas -- where the Pakistani military claimed the Taliban had "lost".

US and UN intelligence maps that were issued or leaked during 2005 to 2007, and more recent NATO/ISAF maps issued in January 2009, do show the size of the high risk-areas inside Afghanistan have increased by 30% to 50% every year since 2005. Kabul is scarcely under siege, but it has turned from a city where NATO/ISAF and aid personnel could wander as tourists to one so filled with violence that the US and foreign compounds have become the equivalent of a "Green Zone." There has been a particularly serious increase in violence in the Afghan-Pakistan border area. There were 431 insurgent attacks in the Khyber border area during January-November 2007, and 625 during the same period in 2008 – an increase of 45%.^{iv}

Yet, if anything, these data understate the scale of the problem since they do not count all the Afghan on Afghan violence that does not attack government officials and forces, and kidnappings, night letters, and Taliban attacks on Afghan civilians have spread to cover nearly half of the country. The UN rates nearly half the country as unsafe for movement by aid workers not supported by troops, and security has deteriorated sharply in Kabul, particularly in the last year. The level of violence, incidents, and casualties continues to rise, as does the frequency and intensity of combat. A new threat has also developed to US and NATO/ISAF lines of supply, as well as imports from Pakistan, during 2008. This is critical because at least 60% of all supplies come from ports in Pakistan across the border in the Khyber and FATA areas.

While detailed maps that show the growth of Taliban, Hekmatyar, and Haqqani areas of influence are classified, it is clear from unclassified briefings that these insurgent groups continue to expand their influence at the local level. Although they are controversial, estimates by the International Council on Security and Development (formerly the Senlis Council) indicate that the^v

“Taliban now holds a permanent presence in 72% of Afghanistan, up from 54% a year ago. Taliban forces have advanced from their southern heartlands, where they are now the de facto governing power in a number of towns and villages, to Afghanistan’s western and north-western provinces, as well as provinces north of Kabul. Within a year, the Taliban’s permanent presence in the country has increased by a startling 18%. Three out of the four main highways into Kabul are now compromised by Taliban activity. The capital city has plummeted to minimum levels of control, with the Taliban and other criminal elements infiltrating the city at will.

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

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

By blocking the doors to the city in this way, the Taliban insurgents are closing a noose around the city and establishing bases close to the city from which to launch attacks inside it. Using these bases, the Taliban and insurgent attacks in Kabul have increased dramatically – including kidnapping of Afghans and foreigners, various bomb attacks and assassinations. This dynamic has created a fertile environment for criminal activity. The links between the Taliban and criminals are increasing and the lines between the various violent actors becoming blurred. All of these Taliban successes are forcing the Afghan government and the West to the negotiating table.

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

At the same time, the Afghan government remains absent or ineffective in much of the country, most foreign aid has no practical impact on the security and stability of threatened areas, and the combination of US, NATO/ISAF, and Afghan security forces is far too small to secure the countryside. Refugee problems and poverty are made worse by the problem of both personal and organized crime. While narcotics output is down -- largely because of a saturated market and dropping street price as well as drought issues – it remains a key part of the national economy and a force behind both crime and corruption.

The Impact of Pakistan

These problems are compounded by the situation in Pakistan. The Pakistani Army and government have not provided reliable reporting on military operations or a meaningful assessment of the growth of the threat inside Pakistan. Whatever the Pakistani military may have been, the steady politicization of Pakistan's military forces since Zia has left it largely an inept flatland army steadily more focused on internal control and whose finances and use of outside aid have become progressively more suspect.

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

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

Taken in combination, the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan show why leaks of the draft NIE on Afghanistan – which was effectively complete in October 2008 -- describe the situation in crisis terms and saw 2009 as a critical year. The same is said to be true of the Lute strategy exercise in the NSC. Secretary Gates, Admiral Mullen, and the US and NATO theater commanders have all issued similar warnings in broad terms. The same was true of General Jim Jones, the new NSC advisor, in his reporting on the war to the Atlantic Council of the United States in 2008: "Make no mistake. NATO is not winning in Afghanistan."^{vi}

Meeting the Popular Challenge in Afghanistan

This growth in the threat does not reflect a similar growth in threat military capabilities, or the sophistication of their weapons. The combination of insurgent forces remains relatively weak in military terms. Experts feel that is unlikely that there are more than 30,000 full time fighters and some experts put the numbers at between 10,000-20,000. Many experts believe that the bulk of Jihadist strength consist of part time fighters motivated as much by the money they receive, and the status they get in a society where so many young men have now real jobs or power, as any commitment to Jihadist religious practices and ideology.

While it is increasingly dependent on airpower to make up for its lack of ground strength, NATO is able to win virtually every tactical clash, and no insurgent group has held a major town or city. Yet, no one who was in government at the time of Vietnam can avoid a grim feeling of déjà vu. The current situation in the Afghan Pakistan War has to remind such an observer of an exchange the late Colonel Harry G. Summers described that he had with a North Vietnamese officer after the collapse of South Vietnamese. They were discussing the fighting and Colonel Summers pointed out that US forces and the ARVN had won virtually every clash. The Vietnamese officer smiled and said, "Yes, but that was irrelevant."

A February 2009 poll by ABC News, based on of years of steadily more refined polling efforts in Afghanistan, provides part of the missing picture, and shows just how urgent it is to look beyond the kinetic or tactical aspects of the war, and to shape US efforts to react to Afghan perceptions – and the broader ideological, political, and economic aspects of the war. An analysis by Gary Langer of the ABC News Polling Unit highlights the following trends:

Declining Support for the US and NATO/ISAF

- There has been a significant drop in the number of Afghans who call the U.S.-led invasion and overthrow of the Taliban a good thing for their country – 69%, still a substantial majority but well below the 88% who said so in 2006. And while 63% still support the presence of the U.S. military in Afghanistan, that's down from 78% in 2006, with “strong” support for the U.S. presence down from 30% then to just 12% now. (It's similar now for NATO/ISAF forces. ISAF stands for International Security Assistance Force, the U.N.-mandated, NATO-led multinational force in Afghanistan.)
- In 2005, 83% of Afghans expressed a favorable opinion of the United States Today just 47% still hold that view, down 36 points, accelerating with an 18-point drop in approval of the US in 2008. For the first time slightly more Afghans see the United States unfavorably than favorably.
- The number who say the United States has performed well in Afghanistan has been more than halved in the last three years, from 68% in 2005 to 32% now.
- Ratings of NATO/ISAF forces are no better. Just 37% of Afghans say most people in their area support Western forces; it was 67% in 2006. And 25% now say attacks on U.S. or NATO/ISAF forces can be justified, double the level, 13%, in 2006.
- The election of Barack Obama does not hold much promise in the eyes of the Afghan public: While 20% think he'll make things better for their country, nearly as many think he'll make things worse. The rest either expect no change – or are waiting to see.
- Just 18% say the number of U.S. and NATO/ISAF forces in Afghanistan should be increased. Far more, 44% want the opposite – a decrease in the level of these forces.
- **Far fewer Afghans than in past years say Western forces have a strong presence in their area (34%, down from 57% in 2006), or – crucially – see them as effective in providing security (42%, down from 67%).**

The Taliban is Still Seen as the Key Threat, But As Growing Stronger and Becoming More Popular

- 58% of Afghans see the Taliban as the biggest danger to the country, measured against local warlords, drug traffickers or the U.S. or Afghan governments. And 43% say the Taliban have grown stronger in the past year, well more than the 24% who think the movement has weakened.
- Notably more in the Southeast and Southwest – 55% – say the Taliban have grown stronger. And again in Helmand province, the heart of the opium trade that's said to finance the group, 63% say the Taliban have gained strength.
- The Taliban are far from achieving popular support – across a range of measures the group still is shunned by vast majorities of Afghans. But 22% say it has at least some support in their area, and this soars to 57% in the Southwest overall, including 64% in its home base, Kandahar. That's up sharply from 44% in the Southwest last year, and up from 41% in Kandahar.
- There's also evidence the Taliban have made some progress rebranding themselves. Twenty- four% of Afghans say it's their impression the Taliban “have changed and become more moderate” – far from a majority, but one in four. And that view spikes in some provinces – most notably, to 58% in Wardak and 53% in Nangarhar, bordering Kabul to the west and east, respectively.
- Another result indicates a possible change in tactics. Twenty-six% of Afghans report bombings by the Taliban in their area; that's down from 43% in 2006. Thirty-two% report murders by the Taliban – down by

10 points from 2006 (though level with 2007). Reports of Taliban engagements with government or foreign troops is down by 12 points; arson attacks on school or government buildings, down by 18 points from the 2006 peak.

- 64% of Afghans say the government should negotiate a settlement with the Taliban in which they're allowed to hold political offices if they agree to stop fighting. But among those who support negotiations, most by far, seven in 10, say talks should occur only if the Taliban stop fighting first.
- 33% of Afghans think the government will defeat the Taliban outright with foreign support. Another 33% expect a negotiated settlement; 19% expect continued fighting; 8% foresee an outright Taliban victory.

But, Afghan Views of Their Own Security Indicate that NATO/ISAF and the US Are Joining the Taliban in Being Perceived as the Threat

- The number of Afghans who rate their own security positively has dropped from 72% in 2005 to 55% today – and it goes far lower in high-conflict provinces. In the country's beleaguered Southwest (Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Uruzgan and Zabul provinces). Only 26% feel secure from crime and violence. In Helmand alone, just 14% feel safe.
- 25% report car bombs or suicide attacks in their area in the past year; three in 10, kidnappings for ransom. 38% report civilian casualties in the past year, *attributed about equally either to U.S./NATO/ISAF forces or to anti-government forces*, and somewhat less so to Afghan government forces.
- There's been a 9-point drop in the number of Afghans who mainly blame the Taliban for the country's violence, to 27%. More, now 36%, mostly blame U.S., Afghan or NATO forces, or their governments, for the violence in Afghanistan, up by 10 points in 2008.
- Civilian casualties in U.S. or NATO/ISAF air strikes are a key irritant. Seventy-seven% of Afghans call such strikes unacceptable, saying the risk to civilians outweighs the value of these raids in fighting the Taliban. Forty-one% chiefly blame U.S. or NATO/ISAF forces for poor targeting, vs. 28% who mainly blame the insurgents for concealing themselves among civilians.
- All told, one in six Afghans reports bombing or shelling by U.S. or NATO/ISAF forces in their area within the past year, but with an enormous range, peaking at nearly half in the Southwest and nearly four in 10 in the East (Nuristan, Kunar, Laghman and Nangarhar), bordering part of Pakistan's Taliban-associated tribal areas.
- Among people who report coalition bombing or shelling in their area, support for the presence of U.S. forces drops to 46%, vs. 70% among those who report no such bombardment.
- While 25% of all Afghans say violence against U.S. or other Western forces can be justified, that jumps, to 44%, among those who report coalition bombing or shelling in their area, and to 38% in the top five high-conflict provinces (Helmand, Ghazni, Kandahar, Paktia and Khost). It's 18%, by contrast, where no bombing or shelling has occurred, and 15% in the provinces where conflict has been lowest, roughly the northern half of the country.
- Germany's favorability rating is high at 61%; but its NATO/ISAF troops in Afghanistan have been in the North, away from the heaviest fighting. Favorable views of Great Britain are much lower, 39%; ratings of United States have dropped steadily to 47%, from a high of 83% in 2005.
- 91% of Afghans have an unfavorable opinion of Pakistan (up 11 points from last year), and 86% say Pakistan is playing a negative role in Afghanistan.
- 74% of Afghans see India favorably. Fewer but a majority, 57%, also have a favorable view of Iran, Afghanistan's neighbor to the west.

Afghan Views of Their Government, and Current Hopes for the Future

- In 2005, in the full flush of celebration over the Taliban's ouster, 83% of Afghans approved of the work of President Karzai and 80% approved of the national government overall. Today those have slid to 52 and 49% respectively. (Karzai's expected to run for re-election in August.) Fewer than half rate their provincial government positively.

- 59% still think the Afghan government is making progress in providing a better life for Afghans, 75% express confidence in its ability to provide security and stability, as many express confidence in their local police, and nearly as many in their provincial government.
- 57% of Afghans rate the performance of the police positively, and ditto for the Afghan Army – not overwhelmingly positive measures, but the best out there. (Again as noted, just 32 rate the performance of the United States positively; 33%, NATO/ISAF forces.) Given Afghan institutions' support, it could prove more popular to put their imprint – rather than a Western face – on anti-insurgent efforts.
- Anywhere from 63% to 66% report support for these entities among people in their area. And even though support for the central government has declined from 81% in 2007 to 65% now, these levels remain far higher than support for other players – U.S. or NATO/ISAF forces (as reported above, 37%), local commanders, 17%; foreign Jihadis, 14%; the Taliban, 9%; and drug traffickers, 7%.
- Among people who say the central government has a strong presence in their area, 58% rate it positively; where its presence is seen as weak, that drops to 31%. Provincial governments are rated positively by 57% where they are seen as strong vs. 22% where weak. And the United States is rated positively by 46% among those who see U.S. or NATO/ISAF forces as strong in their area – vs. 25% where those forces are seen as weak.
- The number of Afghans who expect their lives to improve in the year ahead has dropped from a peak of 67% in 2005 to 51% today. 47%, expect a better life for their children, hardly a ringing endorsement of Afghanistan's future prospects.
- Anger against official corruption has swelled; 85% of Afghans call it a problem and 63% call it a big problem – the latter up from 45% last year. And half say corruption has increased in the past year, more than twice as many as say it's subsided.
- Ratings for the Afghan government, and Karzai personally, run anywhere from 9 to 15 points lower among people who call corruption a major problem, compared with those who call it a moderate or less serious concern.

Afghan Views of Their Economy, Aid, Drugs, and Hopes for the Future

- While 62% of Afghans rate their basic living conditions positively, that's declined steadily from 83% in 2005. And just 29% say there's a good supply of jobs or economic opportunities in their area. The number who characterize their economic opportunities as "very bad" has doubled since 2006 – from 17% then to 33% now, one in three Afghans.
- 55% have no electricity whatsoever in their homes; just one in 20 has power all day. More than half report incomes less than the equivalent of \$100 a month; 93%, under \$300. Fifty-nine% have no formal education. Forty-eight% cannot read.
- The affordability of food is worsening: 63% of Afghans say they cannot afford to buy all or even "some but not all" of the food they need, up 9 points. And while 63% report adequate availability of food (regardless of affordability), that's down from 82% in 2006.
- Fuel prices, likewise, are a major problem; 68% say they can't afford the fuel they need for cooking or heat, a serious issue in the cold Afghan winter.
- After electricity supply – steadily the single biggest complaint – economic opportunity and prices, another poorly rated area is support for agriculture, such as the availability of seed, fertilizer and farm equipment, a central concern in a country that's three-quarters rural, with food prices so problematic.
- In other areas, barely over half rate their access to medical care positively. Just under half positively rate their protection from the Taliban and other armed groups. While 61% say they can move about safely, that's down 10 points from 2007, and leaves four in 10 without such freedom of movement. And beyond food and fuel, in terms of prices overall, 58% report difficulty being able to afford things they want and need.
- 72% of Afghans say schools have been rebuilt or reopened in their area in the past five years (up 7 points from 2007); 53%, mosques; 47%, roads (up 12 points); 45%, health clinics (up 8 points); and 44%, police stations.

- Fewer than half, 42%, say they have good roads, bridges and other infrastructure in their area, that's up sharply from 24% in 2005. Seventy-seven% rate their local schools positively; 65% say they have clean water, up 12 points compared with 2007 and a new high. And 73% support the presence of foreign aid organizations in Afghanistan.
- Nonetheless, 51% say foreign aid groups are making progress in providing a better life for Afghans. And fewer still, 30% of Afghans, say foreign development aid has benefited them personally. (Nearly three-quarters are worried about the impact of the global financial crisis on aid to their country.)
- 63 % of Afghans call raising opium poppy "unacceptable in all cases." But in the six top- producing provinces that drops to 31 % – and in Helmand, source of two-thirds of Afghanistan's opium poppy, to just 12%. Even nationally, few Afghans, just 13%, support spraying pesticides as a way to eradicate the crop.

Such polls provide clear warnings, but they also show that the Taliban and other movements are still unpopular in most of Afghanistan. Much of Taliban and Jihadist influence comes from a lack of any Afghan government presence or activity. This commonly occurs as a result of the fact that US and NATO/ISAF forces cannot secure the countryside, and because aid is not effective or the Afghan government provides no meaningful services and/or is deeply corrupt.

The Challenges that Must Be Met

The point is not that the trends in Afghan public opinion – which are far more favorable than those in Pakistani public opinion -- show that the war is now being lost. It is rather that the US and its allies face an immediate challenge to find ways to decisively reverse the course of the fighting in Afghanistan, and bring high-risk areas and areas of Taliban influence under control. They must also find ways to deal with the immediate threat posed by the Taliban, Haqqani, Hekmatyar, and Al Qa'ida in Pakistan, and to guard against any form of spoiler operation by Iran.

The Afghan Forces Challenge

One key challenge is to create effective Afghan security forces. Until recently, the development of Afghan security forces has been understaffed, and poorly funded. Although the Taliban forces were defeated in 2001, the US did not seriously fund Afghan forces development until 2007. While there are different ways to total the figures, no serious funding came until 2005. Total US security funding then leapt from \$2.4 billion to \$7.8 billion in FY 2007, only to drop to \$1.8 billion in 2008 and \$2.3 billion in 2009. Spending these funds involved substantial delays in disbursement and further worsened the problem.^{vii}

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

The near doubling of the force goal means that providing more assets is now even more urgent. Funding to equip the ANA is limited, and efforts to give it sustainability remain uncertain. The ANA is still being trained largely in terms of battalion-equivalents, rather than as an integrated army, and the Afghan Air Force is only beginning to be revived as an active

force. ANA units are relatively capable, but they are just beginning to acquire the ability to operate independently.

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

The NATO/ISAF Challenge

At the same time, more US troops are needed until the Afghan forces become large and capable enough to do most of the job, and the US must deal with an awkward and divided command chain in NATO, which consists of three, three-star officers and often conflicting national caveats and command chains, and a US command chain that presents serious problems.

In December 2008, NATO/ISAF also consisted of 51,350 personnel. A total of 31,400 were allied, and they were a mix of allied forces from some 41 countries that are unlikely to make major reinforcements. They also are divided into “combat” -- UK (8,745), Poland (1,130), Denmark (700), Canada (2,750), Netherlands (1,770), etc -- and largely “stand aside” forces -- France (2,785), Germany (3,600), Italy (2,350), etc. ^{ix}

This has led US commanders to talk about increasing the US presence in Afghanistan of some 34,000 men and women by 20,000-35,000 more troops, and commit to sending 17,000 more during the course of 2009. It has also led to the announcement of efforts to try provide enough US trainers and embeds to nearly double the size of the Afghan Army, to try to reshape a failed police training effort, and of plans to create new local militias.

The Economic Aid Challenge

Another challenge is to make effective use of economic aid, and recognize that the immediate focus must be warfighting, not “post conflict reconstruction” or long-term development. The military problems in Afghanistan have been made far worse by a deeply divided and corrupt economic aid effort that continues to set unrealistic goals based on peacetime priorities. Furthermore the UN, NGOs, as well as the US and its allies have failed to properly staff, protect, and administer the aid effort with any effectiveness.

Since 2001, the U.S. has provided approximately \$32 billion in humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan. ^x In addition, the international community has provided a further \$25.3 billion. The overall aid effort has also focused on the priorities of broad conceptual aid plans.

The US set vague goals in the Afghan Freedom Act in 2002. In January of 2006, 64 countries and 11 international organizations attended the London Conference on Afghanistan and approved the Afghanistan Compact which focused on three pillars: Security, Governance (Rule of Law and Human Rights), and Economic and Social Development. The most recent addition to the Afghanistan Compact is the Afghanistan National Development Strategy that was signed by President Hamid Karzai on April 21, 2008. It contains another broad set of strategies for improvements in security, governance, economic growth, as well as poverty

reduction based on both the UN's Millennium Development Goals and the Afghanistan Compact. It presents goals to be accomplished in the years 2008-2013.^{xi}

There is, however, a critical lack of realistic detailed plans to meet real world priorities, and of adequate accounting systems and meaningful measures of effectiveness for these efforts even eight years after their start. Some of these accounting and management problems may be corrected by the creation of a Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) in 2008, but the Congress did not fully fund the office and it will not be fully operational and able to begin its work until the fall of 2009.^{xii}

“Win” or “Clear, Hold, Build”

The US and its allies must also address a critical mass of these challenges at the same time if NATO/ISAF, and the Afghan and Pakistani governments are to have any success. They must adapt the “clear, hold, build” strategy in high threat districts that the US used with some success in Iraq to meet the needs of Afghanistan. Reporting by the Department of Defense in January 2009 has stated that this is now US strategy, but implement such a strategy requires effective plans and actions to integrate military operations with aid in governance, development, and employment, This also must be done at the local level, and be implemented in every critical direct now under Jihadist attack, influence or control. It means shifting from the top down, central government approach to security and aid used since 2002 to a new approach that also builds up security and development at the town, district, and provincial level.

Success also means recognizing the urgency involved. This is not simply dealing with the growth of threat outlined earlier. The lead times involved alone ensure that it can take months to more than a year to fully fund, deploy and execute plans; that most cannot be executed during the winter campaign season; and that large-scale action may only have been taken towards the end of the major summer campaign season in 2009. It is also far from clear if US plans to strengthen the US military forces in Afghanistan are matched by credible options to increase the flow of aid where it is needed and to provide the mix of military and civilian US aid workers and trainers. This is also a problem in resources that must be matched by an increase in US and allied supply and logistic capacity – a growing challenge in its own right.

The Afghan Political Challenge

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

Furthermore, President Karzai is negotiating with elements of the Taliban and has been reported to have expressed a desire to meet with Hekmatyar and Haqqani to try to find ways to include “moderate elements” in the government and/or to split such movements and create local ceasefires and alliances.

These types of political arrangements have failed in both Afghanistan and Pakistan in the past, and have effectively allowed extremist elements to dominate the areas where ceasefires and

agreements took place. They have worked in other counterinsurgency campaigns, but almost always where the government was already decisively winning, the insurgency was severely threatened, movements had already split, hard-line ideologues were at least partially isolated, and the government had offered credible incentives. These conditions do not yet exist in either Afghanistan or Pakistan.

The Pakistan Challenge

The situation in Pakistan presents equally complex challenges that really require a separate analysis in depth. They are especially significant because the strategic center of gravity in the war has shifted from Afghanistan to Pakistan. Regardless of Pakistani public statements, both public opinion polls and the private statements of Pakistani officers and officials show that much of Pakistan sees the Afghan War as a largely American war that is destabilizing Pakistan. It is also clear that Pakistan has other interests that it sees as having higher strategic priority.

Looking Towards Solutions: Key Steps that Must Be Taken

The Afghan-Pakistan War has so far been a war in which the US has consistently failed to honestly assess the situation, failed to seek the level of support it needs from the Congress and American people, and failed to focus on the fact it is fighting a war and not carrying out post-conflict reconstruction. The US has consistently underreacted to the growth of the threat in providing troops and resources, and has failed to act decisively in putting pressure on the Afghan and Pakistani governments. It has also allowed the State Department and AID to make even more mistakes in shaping and administering aid than in Iraq, and done nothing to reform the massive failures and corruption in the international aid effort.

The question now is whether the US will now react decisively enough to reverse this situation. If it leads and leads decisively, it should still be able to win in the practical sense of the term. The Taliban, other Jihadist movements, and Al Qaeda in Pakistan remain relatively weak and unpopular movements. They are winning because the US and NATO/ISAF failed to react, to deploy the forces that were needed, to give proper priority and resources to building up Afghan forces, and allowed the administration of foreign aid to become a corrupt and horribly misadministered mess. They are winning because Afghanistan can hold elections but has not elected those who can govern. They are winning because Pakistan still does not see this struggle as its war, and has been caught up a series of inept and corrupt governments focused on other issues.

There are five key steps the US needs to take:

- ***Shift from a failed focus on winning tactical clashes to implementing a strategy of “win, hold, build” that also offers security, development, and governance of the kind that will eliminate Taliban and Jihadist control and influence in the most critical areas and population centers of Afghanistan.*** The question is whether the US can find the added troops and aid workers who can function in a high threat environment, and is willing to allocate the necessary resources at a time of global financial crisis. So far, the answer may well be no.

It is far from clear that 17,000 troops will be enough, it is unclear where the added aid workers will come from or how they will function, there is no coherent plan or budget

to provide the necessary financial resources, and it is unclear how the US can rationalize the awkward mix of military command structures and a failed effort to administer effective international aid. The US needs to provide a clear public plan to show what it expects its planned force levels to do, and whether they are adequate for the mission.

- ***Focus on improving Afghan governance rather than politics and elections.*** It is far from clear that even the most successful Afghan elections will do anything to bring better leadership and government. The end result is likely to be an inept and corrupt Afghan central government facing steadily more military pressure and now having to cope with an international financial crisis and growing problems in actually getting international aid.

The US cannot wait for improvements in governance at the provincial and local level. It is clear that it must not only seek to build Afghan capacity at the center, but in key provinces and districts, expanding the role of its Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and seeking whatever allied aid it can obtain. This does not mean undermining the central government but it does mean supplementing it. There is no time to wait for the central government to develop the level of competence it needs. Waiting for Karzai is like waiting for Godot; it is an empty exercise in existentialist futility.

- ***Provide adequate forces for the “win, hold, build” mission by strengthening Afghan national security forces (ANSF).*** This means staffing and funding an effort to develop the Afghan National Army as rapidly as possible, and supporting it in the field with adequate numbers of embedded combat advisors. It means giving warfighting priority over regular police functions and the “rule of law,” and strengthening the police – if the advisory resources can be found – so it can hold and provide local security in the face of Taliban and other Jihadist threats.

It means that ambitious force expansion programs – talking about major expansions of the Afghan forces to levels of 400,000 – must be tied to real world resources and goals and give priority to sustainable force quality over number bashing exercises in expanding force quantity. One thing is clear, providing 30-40% of the needed advisors and erratic funding without a credible long-term plan and consistency has helped make our efforts inadequate in the past and will do so in the future. It also means tying the development of local security to the overall development of governance and the ANSF so that they both aid in providing local security and do not become a rival source of power or tool for Taliban penetration.

- ***Carry out a ruthless reform of both the US and international economic aid effort,*** even if this means a major reorganization of US aid efforts, and deliberately embarrassing allied, UN, and NGO aid efforts where they are inept or corrupt. The US needs to apply the investigative and reporting methods used by the Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction (SIGIR) to all aspects of US aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to the aid efforts of our allies, the UN, and NGO.

The war cannot be won in either Afghanistan or Pakistan unless the US to demand effective aid plans that are related to real world wartime and development needs, and that are tied to transparent public audits and measures of effectiveness. The US needs to treat the effectiveness of aid as being of equal or greater importance in comparison

to tactical warfighting. It needs to define the mission of the new Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) so no element of US, allied, UN, or private aid is a sacred cow, and so its mission includes Pakistan and a detailed assessment of the individual operations of each key element of the Afghan and Pakistan government. It needs to name names and directly assign responsibility. It needs to highlight successes, but also areas of corruption, ineptness, and failure. Aid needs to be held to a new, ruthless, and demanding standard.

This same degree of realism needs to be applied to ambitious plans to recruit more civilian aid workers. No one needs well-intentioned, semi-qualified people who cannot operate in the field, and are not willing to risks. Warfighting requires civilians who can function in combat and high risk environments, go where they are really needed, and bring skills that are required in forward areas. The failure to understand this on the part of some who talk blithely about reserve forces, large-scale training programs, or bringing in people from outside defense is not an exercise in “smart power,” it is an exercise in operational stupidity.

The opposite is true of experimental concepts like creating Stability Brigades. US military forces can, and do, execute most of the “hold” and “build” mission. Some advocates of this concept, however, seek to make the force so specialized that it cannot act as a warfighting element and carry out the “win” side of the mission. Thus would be a critical mistake. There are no prospects that the US can ever count on having enough forces to provide adequate “win capability,” and the risk that conflicts will escalate and that soldiers performing the “hold” and “build” mission will come under broad or focused attack is simply too great. The US military will have to take on “civilian” roles throughout the duration of the Afghan-Pakistan conflict. Rhetoric aside, the war will be won or lost before anything like an adequate number of “civilian partners” will be available that can actually operate in armed national building as distinguished from post-conflict reconstruction.

- ***Make hard choices in dealing with Pakistan, and accept the fact that the most critical struggle is not in Afghanistan, but against Al Qa’ida and other sources of international terrorism in Pakistan and threats to Pakistan’s internal stability.*** The US may be fighting in Afghanistan but the key struggle is in another country. A Taliban victory in Afghanistan would almost certainly create a major new sanctuary for Al Qa’ida as well as empower every violent and extremist Jihadist movement in the world. It is far from clear, however, that any combination of US, Afghan, and NATO/ISAF efforts can win a long war of political attrition in Afghanistan if the Taliban, Al Qa’ida, Haqqani network, Hekmatyar movement, and other threats have a de facto sanctuary in Pakistan. It is also clear that a nuclear-armed Pakistan is far more of a strategic prize than Afghanistan, and that the conversion of Pakistan into a failed or Jihadist state would pose a more serious strategic threat to the US than the loss of Afghanistan.

The US may well never be able to deploy more than limited cadres of advisors, Special Forces, and systems like UCAVs to Pakistan. It may have to depend on the carrot of aid and the stick of political pressure – a series of options discussed in far more detail in a coming article in the *National Journal*. The fact remains, however, that what started as an Afghan War has spread in to the Federally Administered Tribal

Areas (FATA), and Baluchi areas of Pakistan and that this is now the most critical center of gravity in a complex, multidimensional war.

Deadlines and Details

At the same time, there are several areas that require special attention in actually implementing an effective program.

Mandating and Enforcing Realism and Transparency

The US needs to fight the war on the basis of both ruthless realism and transparency, and to persuade its allies, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to do so as well. It needs to provide honest, detailed reporting on what is happening; what is needed to fix the situation; and on progress using real measures of effectiveness. The US and its allies need to stop lying to themselves and others, and to start asking for patience and sacrifice. If they do not change the current situation, we will continue to fly blind in terms of public policy, in validating our future plans and strategy; in developing the ability to know if the resources they provide are adequate, in knowing the level of risk they imposed the men and women we put in danger in the field, and in establishing the level of sacrifice they need to ask from the American people and those of allied nations.

If the past is any prologue to the future, this kind of shift will not come within the US Executive Branch unless it is forced to respond. There must be a Presidential and/or Congressional mandate to hold the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Staff personally accountable for honest and comprehensive reporting that meets its deadlines.

Empty Strategies and Inadequate Budgets and Resources

The US and NATO/ISAF, however, face far more serious problems than a failure to properly characterize the situation and communicate it to the American people. They have never had an effective strategy for winning the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the US in particular has never provided the resources that have been needed to win.

US officials have talked about strategies in broad terms for years. However, as is the case with virtually every other aspect of national security strategy in recent years – such “strategies” have never been tied to detailed implementation plans, credible budgets and force levels, and meaningful milestones and measures of effectiveness.

The US government has failed to integrate its civil and military efforts into an effective future year program budget and plan. It has budgeted by annual supplemental, and in ways that tried to fund “victory” in the coming fiscal year, rather than fund and implement sustained, meaningful efforts.

Much of the open reporting on these budgets has lumped together much of the budget requests and reporting on the war in Afghanistan (which seems to omit the cost of some efforts in Pakistan), with the war in Iraq, and the “war on terrorism.” Budget data have been grouped in largely dysfunctional categories that are not tied to meaningful program or military activity, and are not tied to useful measures of progress and effectiveness.

The end result has been that the Administration failed to provide the resources necessary to win, and then had to react in inadequate annual increments. This chronic underresourcing of

the war makes a sharp contrast with Iraq, and its scale becomes all too clear when one makes a more detailed study of the patterns in expenditures and deployment of military forces over the last eight years.

Even a glancing look at the funding profile for military and civil aid in the Department of Defense report issued in January 2009, reveals the scale of the problems. There was no real effort to create Afghan forces in FY2002 and FY2003. Funding suddenly rose to levels around \$1 billion in FY2004 and FY2005 as the Taliban scored increasing gains. It doubled to \$2.0 billion in FY2006, leaped to \$4.8 billion in FY2007, then drooped to \$2.8 billion in FY2008 and \$2.0 billion in FY2009 – in spite of the fact that the goal for the end strength of the Afghan Army nearly doubled in mid-2008. The funding for democracy/governance aid, development aid, and counternarcotics was similarly erratic – although in different years, and will “crash” between FY2008 and FY2009 (\$3.3 billion to \$0.9 billion)

A report detailing the history and scale of these problems, entitled *Follow the Money: Why the US is Losing the War in Afghanistan*”, is available on the CSIS web site at http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/080919_afghanwarcosts.pdf The Administration finally did seem to focus on the need for more tangible strategies and more resources in early 2008, but it either failed to produce meaningful results or they were too embarrassing to make public in an election year. What happened to the Lute strategy exercise? Where are the plans from Chairman Mullen? Why did the American people have to wait for General Petraeus’s appointment to USCENTCOM to hear of a realistic strategy exercise? Why has there never been a meaningful strategy, plans, and set of effectiveness measures for the overall economic aid effort emerging from the State Department?

Supporting Our Field Commanders and Personnel in the Field

The US needs to take decisive and immediate action to reverse this situation. It also needs to understand we have very little time in which to act, and there are often long lead times into transforming plans into action in the field. The US will either turn defeat into victory during 2009 and 2010, or it will lose. It must focus on short-term warfighting, and this imposes several realities:

- The US will either empower our commanders and country teams in the field, and provide the resources they need to implement them, or lose the war. It doesn’t have time to reinvent the wheel from the outside.
- A figure like 17,000 more men and women in uniform during 2009 may be politically convenient, and limit the strain on US forces and the need to move troops out of Iraq. It is far from clear, however, that it is adequate to meet a requirement that the field commander put at 25,000-30,000 and other experts – including some senior US generals put closer to 40,000 to 50,000. Constantly taking half-measures means constantly ceding the initiative to the Jihadists.
- The US must provide the budgets, military forces, and aid personnel necessary to compensate for years of inadequate effort and under-resourcing. This is not the time to be “cost-effective” at the margins, or to avoid making commitments to funding efforts long enough to work. The US must stop the process of reacting to enemy gains and provide the resources necessary to win the initiative.

- Talking about sending 80 more US civilians from civilian agencies, creating a mobilizable reserve of civilian experts, and creating “stability brigades” of US military forces, has to be tied to delivering qualified, competent personnel who can work in the field and meet command needs. It is far easier to carry out well-intentioned actions in the name of “smart power” than to provide actual operational capability where it is needed, and only successful actions – not good intentions – count.
- This does not mean providing a blank check or ignoring the consequences of such efforts. Congress must ensure that there are fully credible plans and progress, and verify as well as trust. US military history is one that warns that it cannot trust our own national security apparatus in wartime unless we verify its actions. Its recent military history is even more of a warning.

A Shift to “Clear, Hold, and Build?”

The good news is that the US does seem to have the military leadership it needs; it finally is seriously considering efforts to create more civilian “partners” in the field; and it seems to be prepared to make the changes in strategy, tactics and resources that offer real hope of progress.

It may be premature to judge the outcome of current US efforts to reshape its strategy, but recent Department of Defense reporting calls for a focused effort to replace kinetic or tactical operations out of bases with some version of the “clear, hold, and build” tactics used in Iraq. There also seem to be plans to adopt a variation on these efforts in Pakistan where embedded US advisors could quietly help Pakistani security forces develop the counterinsurgency skills they now lack, and “tied” economic aid would help provide “hold and build” capabilities in parts of FATA and the Baluchi border areas.

Such a shift to “clear, hold, and build” -- one that links tactical action to providing a lasting security presence in the field and building support through aid in jobs, economics, and governance -- has already shown promise in the limited areas where it has been attempted. It could potentially reverse many of the problems and failures that empower the Taliban and Al Qaeda over the last seven years.

But, this shift cannot be done slowly or on the cheap. In fact, it is far better to rush in the necessary mix of military and civilian personnel and additional spending now – even at the cost of some waste and overspending – than delay and be forced to react to more enemy gains. In particular, the US needs to ensure that commanders and country teams will ask for and get what they need – rather than only ask for as much as they think they can get or OMB and other outsiders feel they should have.

A shift to a shift to “clear, hold, and build” also cannot be accomplished on a national level or in ways that cover even all of the key districts and urban areas in the east and the south. Resources will be too limited through 2009 and 2010 to do more than begin to create the necessary mix “clear, hold, and build” capabilities in the most critical districts in the border provinces, and in key urban areas like the greater Kabul and Kandahar areas.

This will mean a narrow application of “clear, hold, and build,” and one that leaves considerable risk through at least 2011. It also is far from clear that improvements in US and allied capabilities, and improvement in Afghan forces and local governance, will allow the broad application of “clear, hold, and build” even in the east and the south at any point in the next four years. If this is possible, it will only be possible because of a far more active

Pakistan role in securing the border areas and attacking Al Qa'ida and Jihadist forces in their present sanctuaries.

Set Well-Defined and Realistic Goals for Action in 2009 and 2010

The US will need to show even more strategic patience than it showed in Iraq in 2007, and must seek to persuade its allies to do the same. In the real world, it will take at least two years of patient and consistent effort to reverse the current situation. During this period, the US must focus on realistic goals that deal with the urgent needs of warfighting, and not post-conflict reconstruction in mid conflict and transforming Afghan society or the society and culture of the border areas in Pakistan.

At the same time, the US and its allies will need to set more modest and more realistic goals for those medium and long-term aid activities that do continue. They are not going to transform Afghanistan or Pakistan any more than we did Iraq. Unrealistic dreams of mid and long-term development can waste resources that could be of major value in implementing more modest programs, and hurt rather than help.

Provide Effective Unity of Effort

It is not enough to appoint a US envoy to deal with both Afghanistan and Iraq. There must be an integrated US effort that manages the war as one war and integrates the efforts of the country teams.

The US should never be insensitive to allied voices, advice, and sacrifices. At the same time, there is a need for unity of effort that only one country can lead. The chain of command in Afghanistan, and the overall effort in Afghanistan and Pakistan, must have clear US character and be able to function effectively. It may or may not be possible to put one officer formally in charge in Afghanistan. If NATO/ISAF cannot be fixed, however, the US must develop a de facto parallel command and act on the basis of war winning, not alliance politics.

Provide the Added US Resources Necessary to Win: Stop Trying to Export Responsibility and the Burden

The US will need to be forceful and persuasive developing a coordinated approach with our allies and the Afghan and Pakistani governments, and seeking the most outside aid it can get. At the same time, Americans must accept the reality that US resources must be used to make virtually all of the key increases in forces and spending that our commanders and country teams recommend.

The US needs to make NATO/ISAF work as well as it can. But, the US cannot expect NATO and its allies to fight a war it created and must now shape. The US recruited allies for a police action and nation building and then let an insurgency grow through under-resourcing and neglect – roughly one-fifth of the US mix of manpower and spending in Iraq. This means the US must provide most of the additional US troops, advisors, and resources necessary to reverse the situation or the war will lose. It may well be the case that the current proposals for 30,000 more US troops are the bare minimum necessary to shift from tactical victories to the kind of “clear, hold, build” strategy that had success in Iraq. Whatever happens, the US cannot afford to under-resource the military effort.

Make Developing Afghan Forces the Core of Any Additional Military Build-Up and Focus on Immediate Warfighting Needs

The US and its allies can almost certainly create larger and more effective Afghan forces, and help develop Pakistani counterinsurgency capabilities if Pakistan will let them. The immediate focus should be on building up the Afghan National Army, paramilitary elements of the police, and local security forces. We need to provide the money, advisors, and other support necessary to make the Afghan Army effective and large enough to perform its mission, and to eventually eliminate the need for large US and NATO/ISAF forces.

The US and its allies do not, however, have the resources, quality of Afghan governance, or time to do everything at once. They need to carefully reexamine efforts to create the Afghan National Police. They may well have to stop trying to create conventional police in mid-war and when the foreign advisors, governance, and rule of law necessary to support them are not available. They almost certainly will have to take the risk of creating local security forces to ensure that “clear, hold, and build” tactics can work. This will scarcely be risk free, but much can be done to have them funded and report through the government, and not through warlords or tribal leaders.

Above all, the US must avoid setting force expansion goals for the ANA, and especially the ANP, that rush the process of creating effective forces, seek to solve all warfighting problems by expanding the ANSF, and ignore the need for Afghan force quality and the proper number of US and allied advisors and embeds. This was a critical mistake in the initial efforts to expand Iraqi forces, and it presented problems in Vietnam, Korea, and every US postwar conflict where the US came under serious pressure in a longer-term conflict.

It takes as long as it takes; it takes as many resources as it needs. It requires extensive advisory aid and actual combat leadership from embedded US officers in the field. It depends on providing adequate pay, facilities, weapons, transport, medical services, and disability and death benefits – within the much lower level of expectations that exist in Afghanistan. Trying to create effective forces by talking about them as natural fighters, or focusing on leadership and morale as substitute for the resources needed to create and sustain an effective forces, has never worked in any previous US effort to deal with host country forces, and it will not work in expanding Afghan forces.

Look Beyond the Afghan Central Government and Develop Governance and Services at the Provincial and District Level.

The US and its allies must deal with the reality that the Afghan government cannot be fixed in time to serve as the necessary instrument of victory. They must continue efforts at reforming and aiding the central government, but they also need to make parallel efforts to create effective governance in key urban areas, provinces, and districts. These should be structured to rely on the central government, and have as many ties to it as possible, but we must stop relying on a top down approach.

They need to do more to build-up from the bottom in key urban areas and districts, and strengthen the “middle” at the provincial level. They need to adapt techniques that had considerable success in Iraq. This means resourcing and using US/NATO/ISAF troops and PRTs to provide the core of such services in conflict and in high threat districts until Afghan capabilities can be brought on line and civilian aid workers can be more secure.

Come to Grips with the Massive Problems in the Economic Aid Effort

Economic aid is a weapon, and some of our most successful efforts in Iraq occurred in the field when we substituted dollars for bullets. The US does, however, need to stop talking vacuously about “soft” and “smart power” in Washington and actually provide it in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The US and NATO/ISAF will still have to use US and allied military forces as aid personnel for at least several more years. The latest report on US participation in the PRTs, issued in January 2009, indicates that they now have 1,021 serving military but only 11 DOS, 12 USAID, and 11 USDA civilians. There is no prospect of getting enough civilians, and particularly civilians that can operate in high threat or combat areas. As in Iraq, a civil-military and aid role for the military will be critical.

But, the US and its allies do need operational civilian partners for the military, and reversing the present course of the fighting will mean such civilian partners could be needed for a decade to come. Military efforts – whether combat or civil—need to be matched by training and deploying more civilian advisors. They also need to be supported by funding an economic aid effort based on coherent multi-year plans rather than supplementals and short-term fixes. There will be a medium and long term, and there are other critical needs than warfighting.

What the US in particular can do far more quickly is to make a comprehensive and immediate effort to address the corruption, incompetence, and irrelevance of much of the present foreign aid effort in Afghanistan. As is the case with NATO/ISAF, this will require more hardnosed realism in dealing with our allies. Unlike Iraq, many of the most serious problems lie in allied, international, and NGO efforts. The charges that the Afghan government is corrupt may be true, but so is much of the aid effort. Afghan experts claim that some 40% of aid passes through without impacting on the country, and virtually all experts claim the effort is not properly integrated, that agricultural aid is far too limited, and that aid does not focus on the areas where the Taliban threat is growing.

The US will need equal realism in determining whether parts of the UN effort are divided, corrupt, and focused on longer-term, post-conflict needs. The same is true of the complaints of Afghan and other aid workers that far too many allied and NGO efforts are wasteful or exercises in symbolism. More broadly, some aid workers and military officers complain that such current aid efforts put far too few resources into critical war-related needs and lack meaningful priorities, auditing, and measures of effectiveness. It is even more important, however, to clean up our own aid efforts. We need to start acting on an iron law of government: There are no good intentions, there are only successful actions. The State Department, AID, and Department of Defense have failed to develop an integrated aid plan, budget request, and provide the personnel and funding needed for urgent war fighting needs. This needs to be forced upon the Executive Branch, and the senior officials involved need to be held personally accountable on a regular basis.

The US Congress can play a key role in forcing such changes. Hearings, legislation, and use of the GAO can be key tools in forcing such changes. The Congress has also created a Special Inspector General for Reconstruction in Afghanistan (SIGAR), but not properly funded the effort. The mandate also does not focus on warfighting problems, or call for an integrated review and analysis of aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan and US and non-US efforts. This should be changed immediately, particularly if new US aid efforts are to be directed at the

FATA and Baluchi areas in Pakistan – where the problems in ensuring that aid is used honestly and effectively may be even greater than in most of Afghanistan.

Mandate that All US Government Plans, Budgets, and Reporting Cover the War in both Afghanistan and Pakistan

Appointing a special envoy to cover both Afghanistan and Pakistan is a major step forward in dealing with the fact that the center of gravity in this war is not Afghanistan. It is the threat posed by the creation of Al Qa'ida and extremist sanctuaries in Pakistan, and the risk of destabilizing a major, nuclear-armed, regional power.

The US must treat Pakistan as an integral part of its war effort, and systematically raise the level of incentives and pressures to try to make Pakistan act. It must understand that Pakistan has other priorities, is divided, and requires both economic and military aid to act. Use tied military and economic aid as both incentive and pressure.

At the same time, the US cannot simply have its military forces stand aside from the threat in Pakistan and wait for Pakistan to take military action. President Obama is correct in continuing UAV strikes and keeping up the pressure. This, however, means we need as much dialog with Pakistan as possible and to add more “carrots” to any “sticks.”

Pending legislation to provide aid to the FATA and Baluchi areas is a key potential tool – if the US ensures such aid flows are tied to audits and measures of effectiveness, and if the US or Pakistani personnel are in place to use such aid funds effectively. The US also has every reason to keep up military aid as long as Pakistan is active against the threat and to revitalize efforts to expand the rule of US Special Forces to train Pakistani forces and provide embedded support.

Treat Counternarcotics as Part of Warfighting.

There are many other areas where detailed actions are needed, but one last area where the US and NATO/ISAF need to make major adjustments in failed policies is counternarcotics. Our focus should be on winning the war, not finding new ways to lose it. The US should defer broad eradication efforts until there is major progress in the “build” side of “clear, hold, build,” and creating a viable agricultural sector. It should focus on the threat drugs now present as a key source of Taliban financing. It should avoid focusing on counternarcotics in the countryside, and attack senior drug lords and traffickers as a key source of corruption.

A mid-war crisis is no time for interesting social and economic experiments. Members of Congress and the Administration should not attempt new experiments in eradication—or in providing untested incentives not to grow drugs or crop substitutes—in mid conflict. The US should focus on getting aid to the farmer, particularly in the high threat/high drug areas in the south. The priority is to deal with immediate economic needs now, and move on to more comprehensive efforts once (and if) the trends in the fighting are reversed.

The Strategic Challenge: “Where Does It End?” (And How?)

The US and its allies must reverse the course of events in Afghanistan during 2009 and 2010 to even have a mid and long term to worry about. The very term “post conflict reconstruction” is now a grim Orwellian oxymoron. The immediate issue is warfighting – although this is at

least as much a matter of “hold” – in the sense of providing constant day-to-day local security – and “build” – in the sense of providing jobs, a livelihood, government services, a rule of law and material hope for the future – as it is “clear” or “win” and producing more tactical victories. It also is establishing the proper balance of “clear, hold, and win” in the most critical and threatened population districts and rural areas – not creating development at the national level.

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

Economic development may well have to be limited to meeting the most urgent Afghan needs over a 5-10 year period. The CIA summarizes the situation as follows, “Afghanistan is extremely poor, landlocked, and highly dependent on foreign aid, agriculture, and trade with neighboring countries. Much of the population continues to suffer from shortages of housing, clean water, electricity, medical care, and jobs. Criminality, insecurity, and the Afghan Government's inability to extend rule of law to all parts of the country pose challenges to future economic growth.^{xiv}” This situation can only be changed by major shifts in outside aid efforts that first meet immediate needs for roads, water, and power. This aid must be honestly and effectively administered to infrastructure and more advanced forms of development in ways that have the transparency, accountability, and measures of effectiveness currently lacking in virtually all aid efforts.

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

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

Human rights and the rule of law may take a decade longer or more to evolve than was planned at the Bonn Conference. Drugs and corruption may continue to endure at least at moderate levels in Afghanistan (as they do in the US and Europe). Moreover, achieving these

goals cannot be done on the quick or on the cheap. They will almost certainly require a major US security and military/economic aid commitment for the next decade.

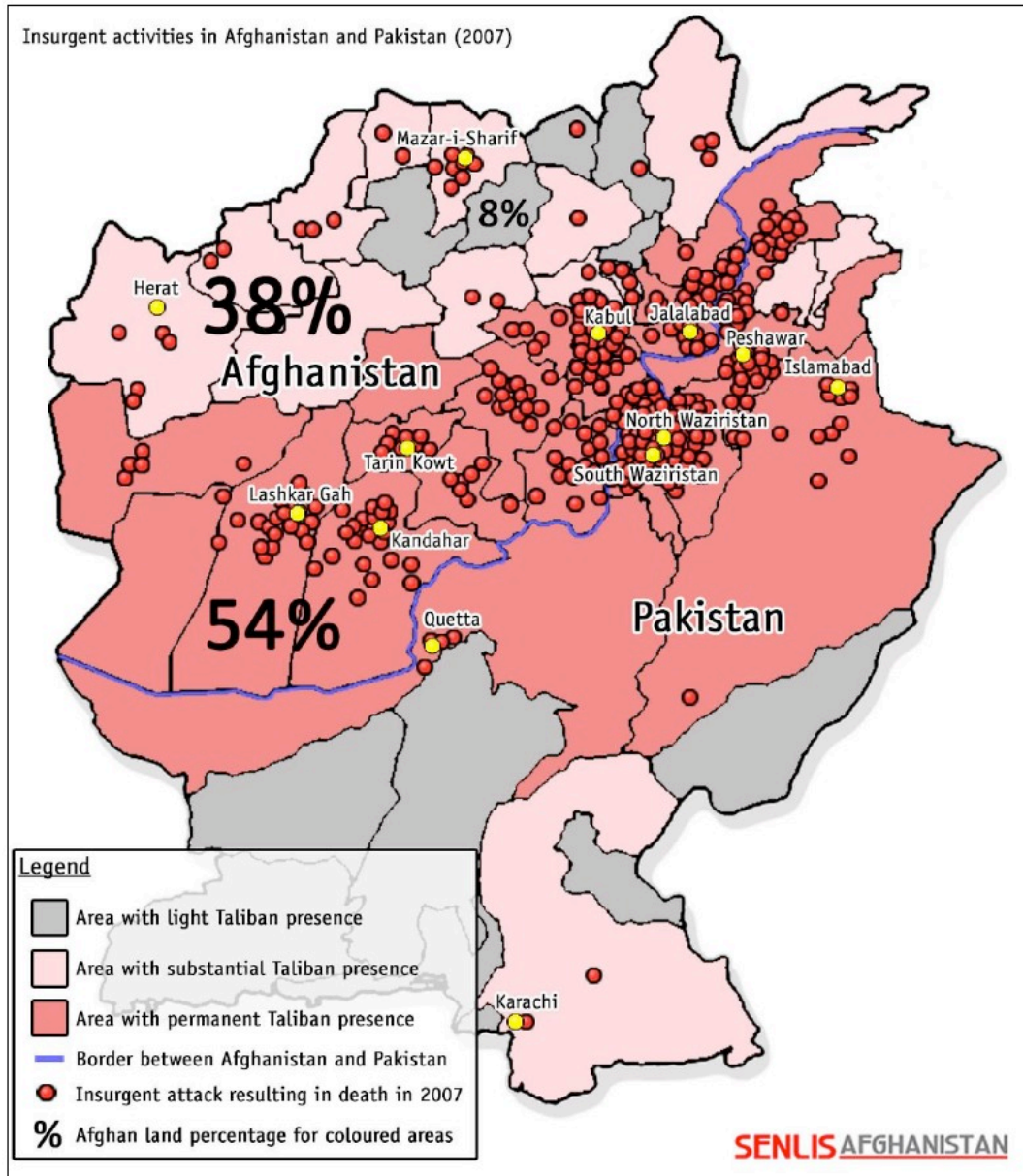
The US also needs to remember that NATO involves far more serious strategic interests than Afghanistan. Talking about Afghanistan as *the* test of NATO ignores the reality that Europe and Atlantic security are vital strategic interests, that they play a critical role in dealing with Russia and the Middle East. NATO should not be judged by the willingness of allied states to project large forces into a war that the US let escalate from peacemaking to insurgency through its own mismanagement.

UN Estimate of Expanding No Go Zones:



Source: Senlis `Afghanistan, Decision Point 2008, London, 2008, p. 27;

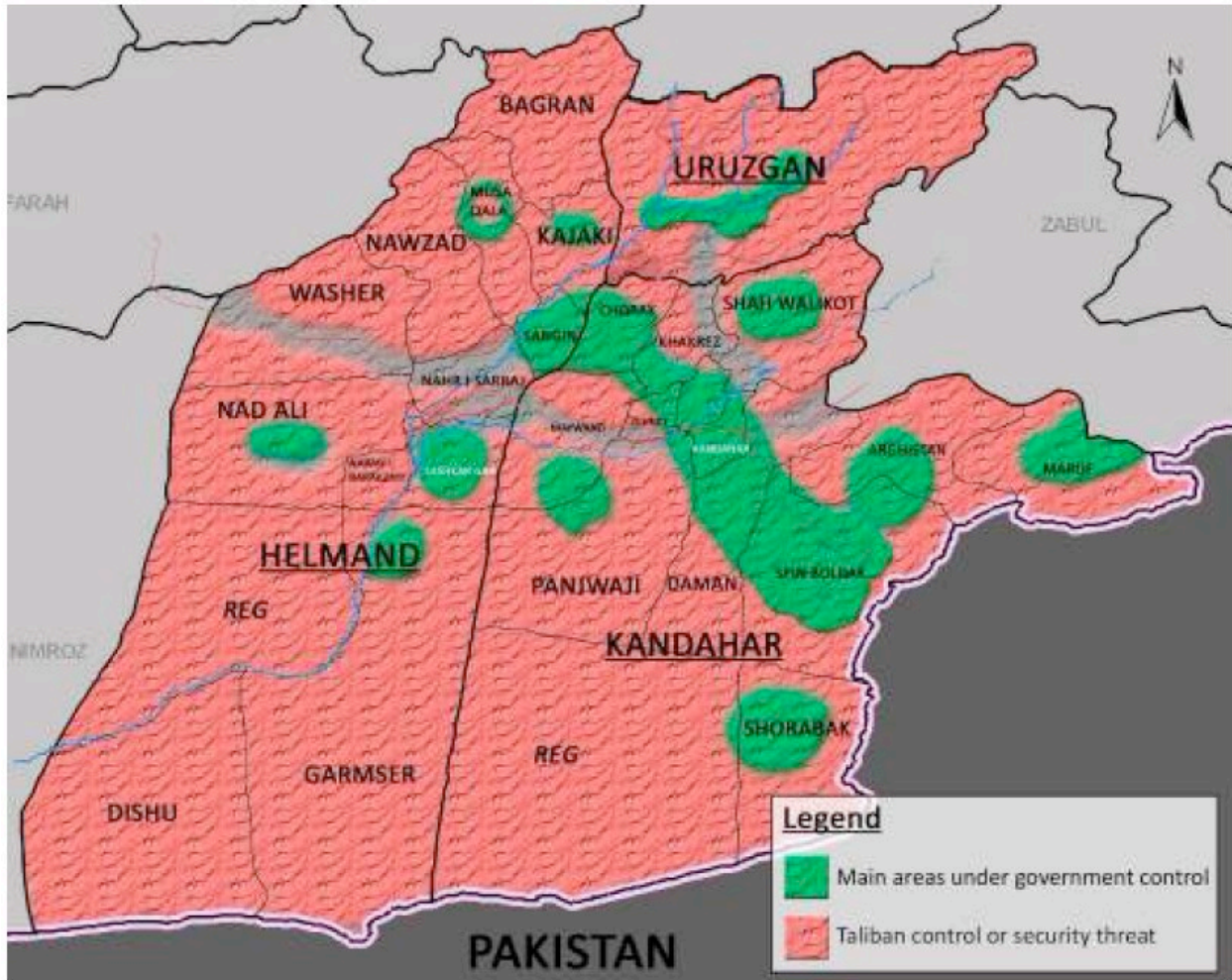
Senlis Estimate of Rise in Fatal Attacks in 2007



Source: Senlis Afghanistan, Decision Point 2008, London, 2008, p. 17

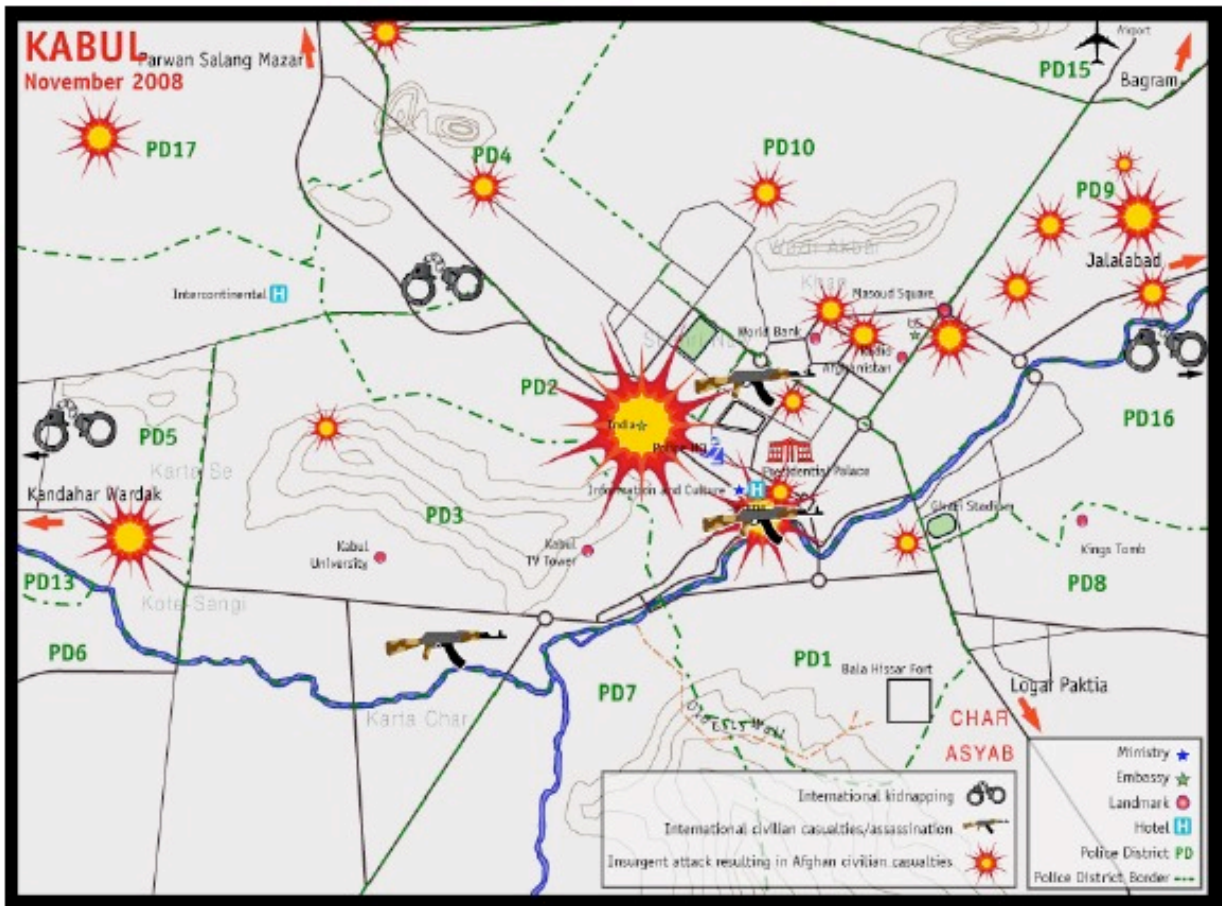
The Limits of Governance: “Government” vs. Taliban control in the South

(Senlis estimate, November 2007)



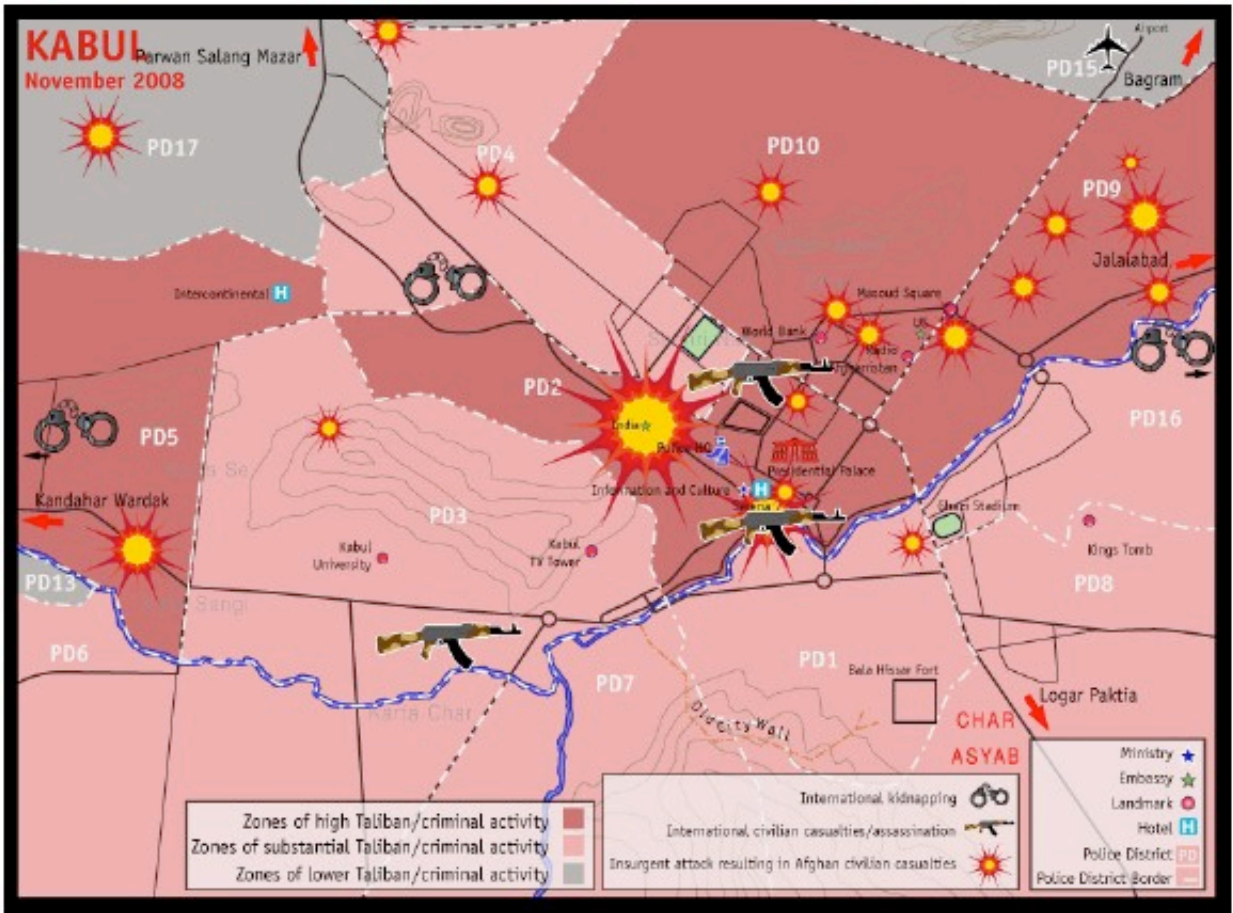
Source: Senlis, “Stumbling into Chaos, Afghanistan on the Brink”, November 2007, p.35.”

Violence in Kabul in 2008



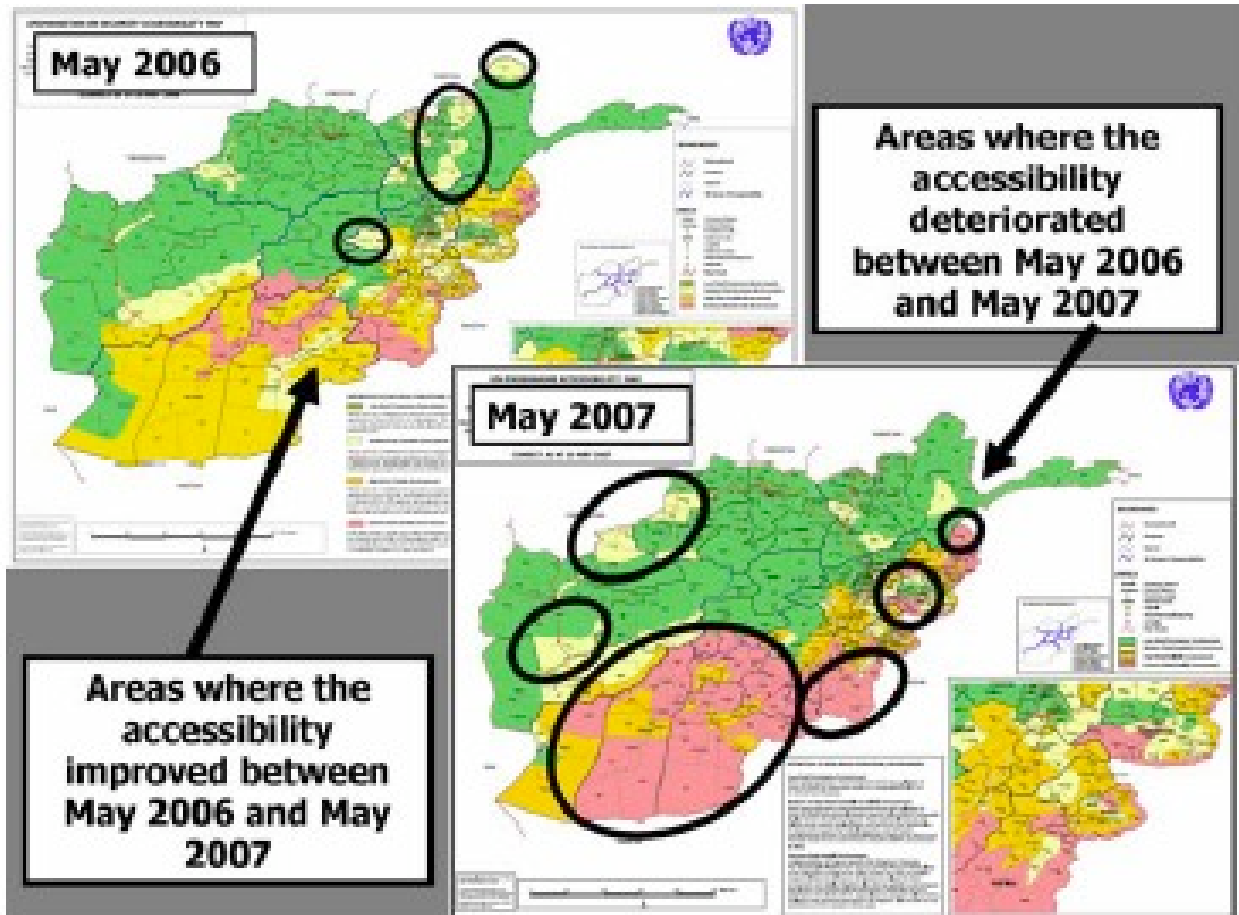
Source: ICOS, The Struggle for Kabul: The Taliban Advance,” December 2008, p. 11

Taliban Activity in Kabul in 2008

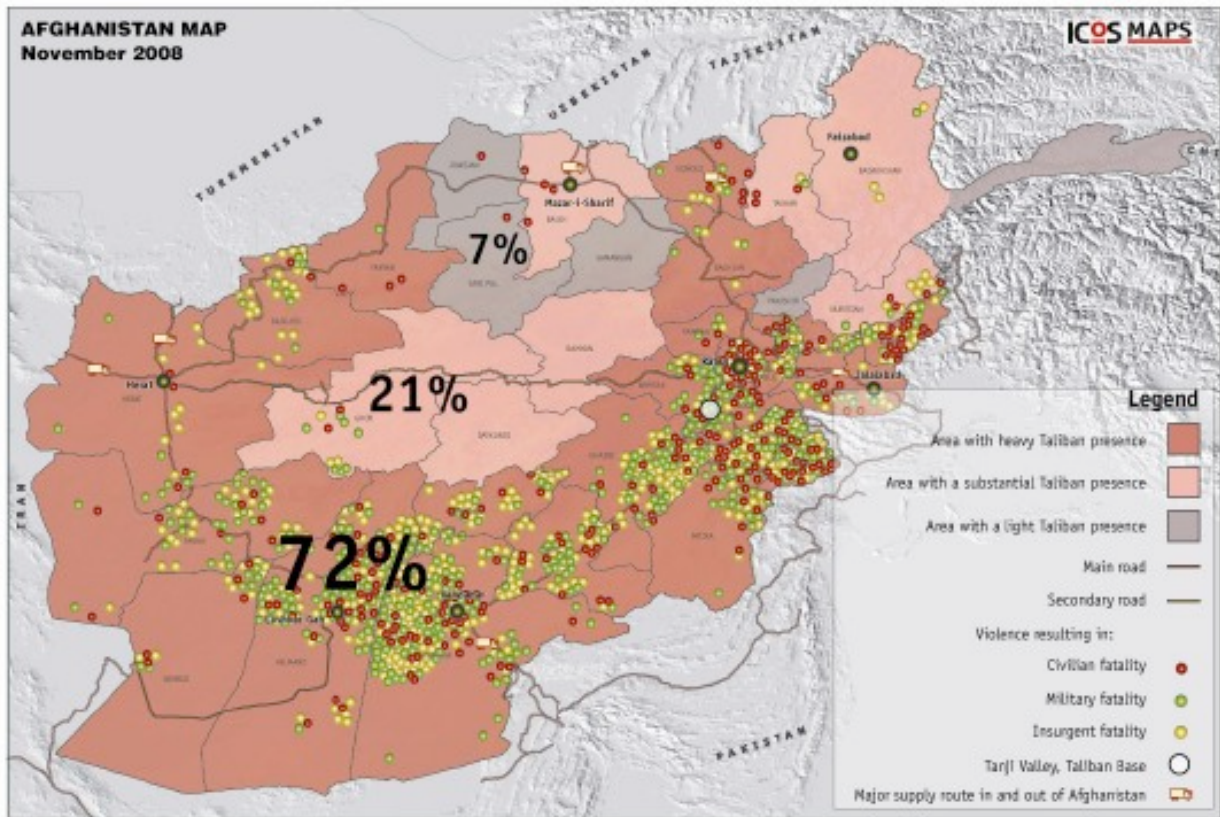


Source: ICOS, 'The Struggle for Kabul: The Taliban Advance,' December 2008, p. 31

UN Estimate of Growth of Inaccessible Areas

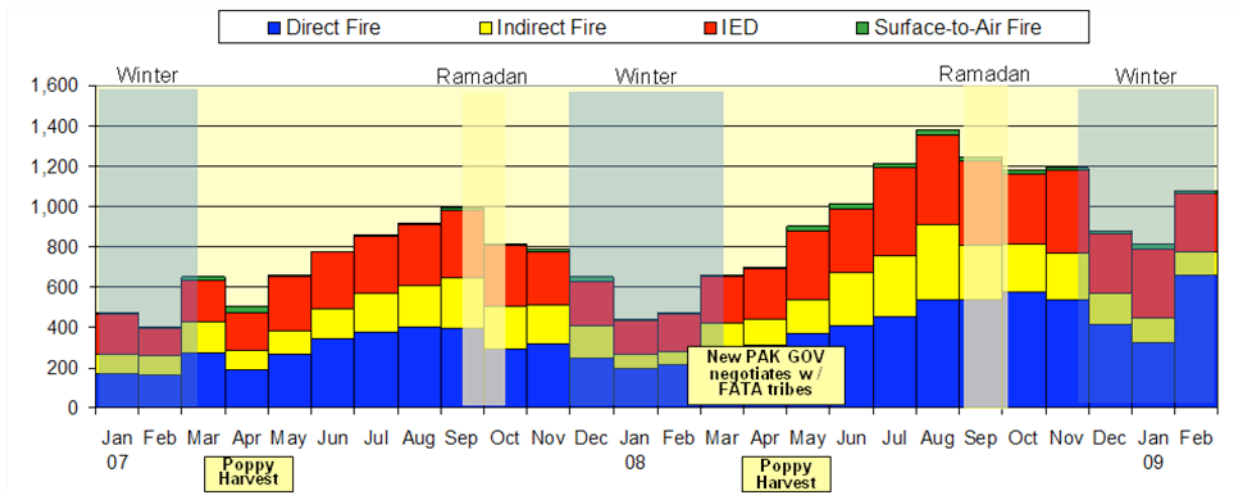


Taliban Presence in November 2008



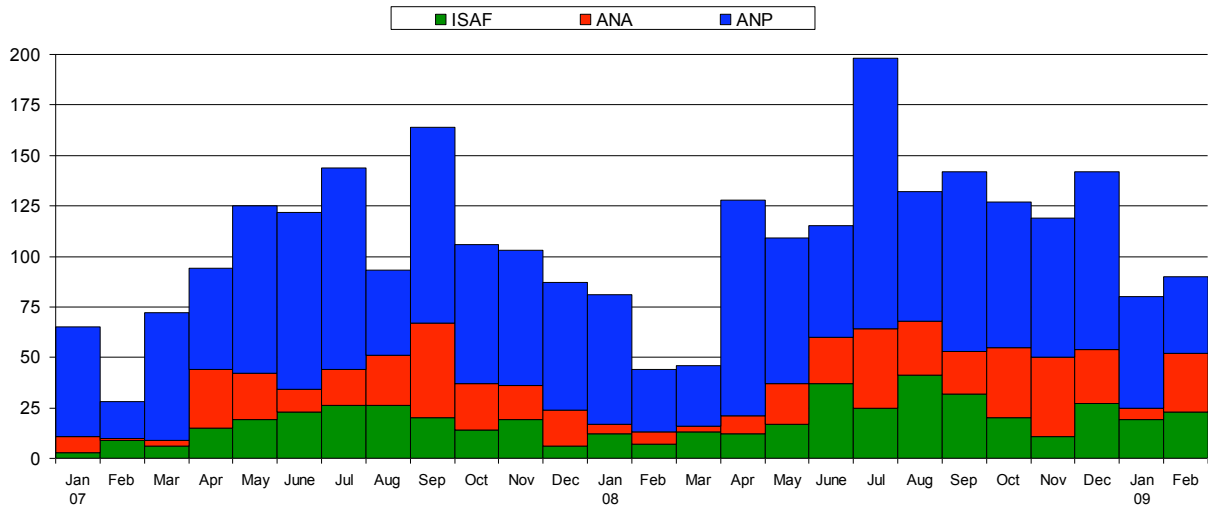
Source: Source: ICOS, "The Struggle for Kabul: The Taliban Advance," December 2008, p.9

NATO Estimate of Insurgent Attacks: 2007 – 2009



Source: “Metrics Brief: February 2009” Strategic Advisory Group HQ ISAF . February, 2009. Pg. 3.

Military Deaths: 2007 - 2009



Source: "Metrics Brief: February 2009" Strategic Advisory Group HQ ISAF . February, 2009. Pg. 6.

Afghanistan vs. Iraq: The Basic Challenges – Part I

Category	Afghanistan	Iraq
Area in Square Kilometers	647,500	437,072
Border length	5,529	3,650
Pakistan	2,430	-
China	76	-
Tajikistan	1,206	-
Turkmenistan	744	-
Uzbekistan	137	-
Iran	936	1,458
Kuwait	-	240
Saudi Arabia	-	814
Syria	-	605
Jordan	-	181
Turkey	-	352
Maximum Elevation	7,48-5	3,607
Land Use		
Arable land:	12.13%	13.12%
Permanent crops:	0.21%	0.61%
Other:	87.66%	86.27%
Irrigated land: (sq. km)	27,200	35,250
Total renewable water resources: (cu km)	65	96.4
Population:	32,738,376	28,221,180
Age structure:		
0-14 years:	44.6%	39.2%
15-64 years:	53%	57.9%
65 years and over:	2.4%	23%
Median age (years)	: 17.6	20.2
Life expectancy at birth (years)	44.2	69.6
Ethnic divisions:		
Pashtun	42%	-
Tajik	27%	-
Hazara	9%	-
Uzbek	9%	-
Aimak	4%	-
Turkmen	3%	-
Baloch	2%	-
Arab	-	75-80%
Kurd	-	15-20%
other	4%	5%
Sectarian Divisions:		
Sunni Muslim	80%,	32-37%
Shi'a Muslim	19%,	60-65%
other	1%	3%
Linguistic Divisions (no percentage data for Iraq, largely Arabic and Kurdish))		
Afghan Persian or Dari (official)	50%	-
Pashto (official)	35%	-
Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen)	11%	-

Afghanistan vs. Iraq: The Basic Challenges – Part II

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ⁱⁱ Amy Belasco, “The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11,” Congressional Research Service, RL33110, Updated July 14, 2008, pp. 16 and 19.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fisnik Abbashi, “Roadside Bomb Kills 4 Troops in Afghanistan,” *Washington Post*, March 16, 2009, p. A8.

^{iv} Candace Rondeaux, “US-Funded Intelligence Center Struggles in the Khyber Region,” *Washington Post*, January 12, 2008, p. A6.

^v See International Council on Security and development, *Struggle For Kabul: The Taliban Advance*, December 2008, pp. 3-5

^{vi} Ann Scott Tyson, “NATO’s Not Winning in Afghanistan, Report Says,” *The Washington Post*, 31 January 2008, p. A18.

^{vii} Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. October 2008, pp. 12, 25-27.

^{viii} Crisis, Group, “Policing in Afghanistan: Still Searching for a Strategy, Asia Briefing No. 85, December 18, 2008, pp. 2-3.

^{ix} Source NATO/ISAF. Current as of December 1, 2008.

^x Estimates differ. These figures come from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), <http://www.sigar.mil/>.

^{xi} For a detailed description of these plans and US aid spending, see Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. October 2008.

^{xii} PL 110-181 authorized a \$20 million drawdown from the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) for the standup of SIGAR during 2008. However, these funds were never disbursed to SIGAR. Actual appropriations from the Supplemental approved on June 30, 2008 resulted in \$2 million being available through September 2008, with an additional \$5 million made available on October 1, 2008. Congress subsequently appropriated \$9 million from the Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act of 2009, which was signed by the President on September 30, 2008. With these funds, hiring has begun and conditions set for resourcing SIGAR’s long-term personnel, facilities, and logistics requirements

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

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