

Background

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Afghanistan: Time for Political Strategy to Capitalize on Military Gains

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Abstract: *The U.S. faces difficult and ongoing challenges in Afghanistan. There have been setbacks, delays, and stumbling blocks in the fight against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, but now is not the time to begin large-scale troop withdrawals or to cut civilian aid programs. By deploying 30,000 additional troops last year, the U.S. has begun to achieve military gains, particularly in the Taliban's traditional strongholds in the South. The Obama Administration must now focus on leading a process of genuine political reconciliation—with help from Pakistan—to stabilize Afghanistan and reduce the chances that the country will once again become a safe haven for terrorists. Two of The Heritage Foundation's top experts on defense and Afghanistan explain how the current U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan has a good chance of succeeding if fully resourced and given the appropriate amount of time.*

The 30,000 additional U.S. troops deployed to Afghanistan last year are beginning to make a difference in the direction of the war. The White House Review on Afghanistan released last December indicated that the additional troops have helped the U.S. and coalition forces to begin to uproot the Taliban from some of their traditional strongholds in southern Afghanistan. Intensified U.S. efforts to train Afghan security forces are also paying dividends, and Afghan forces are strengthening their role in security operations and even taking the lead in many areas.

While the U.S. and coalition forces have made military progress in the crucial southern provinces of

Talking Points

- After numerous setbacks in Afghanistan over the past five years, the deployment of 30,000 additional troops last year has allowed the U.S. to achieve military gains, particularly in Taliban strongholds in the South.
- Now is not the time for large-scale troop withdrawals or cuts in civilian aid programs.
- The Obama Administration must lead a process of genuine political reconciliation—aided by Pakistan—to stabilize Afghanistan and prevent it from once again becoming a terrorist safe haven.
- The Administration must develop a strategy to align the U.S. and Pakistani visions for Afghanistan's future.
- Any progress on the Afghan battlefield will be unsustainable over the long term unless the Pakistani security forces decisively shift their posture toward militant sanctuaries in Pakistan to one of “comprehensive intolerance.”
- NATO's continental members must assist U.S. efforts to train the Afghan National Security Forces, providing additional trainers and embedded mentors.

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Helmand and Kandahar, it remains to be seen whether local civilian government can sustain itself over time. Since fighting inevitably slows in the winter months, some of the gains may be partially attributable to a conscious temporary retreat by the Taliban.

In order to build on these tentative military gains, the Obama Administration must take a stronger leadership role in driving political reconciliation in Afghanistan, intensify efforts to work with Pakistan to deny the Taliban sanctuary there, and bolster diplomatic efforts that encourage regional support for a stable, peaceful, and unified Afghanistan that is inhospitable to international terrorists.

With the recent appointment of veteran diplomat Ambassador Marc Grossman as the new Senior Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, there is an opportunity for the U.S. to push more aggressively for a political solution that prevents Afghanistan from sliding into civil war or reverting to its status as a haven for international terrorists. Such a political solution will not be possible, however, if the U.S. begins large-scale troop withdrawals this summer or substantially cuts funding for U.S. civilian and aid operations that are necessary to build support for a peaceful, stable Afghanistan.

Dropping Dangerous Deadlines

The Administration's decision to shift emphasis from the July 2011 date for the beginning of U.S. troop withdrawals and highlight 2014 as the end of combat operations in Afghanistan was a welcome course correction. The Administration seems finally to have accepted that repeatedly talking about a July 2011 withdrawal date was unhelpful to the overall strategy.

But senior Administration officials must be unequivocal in their statements on dropping the 2011 withdrawal date to fully dispel the perception, both in the region and among coalition partners, that America is losing its will to fight. They should demonstrate full support for NATO and

Downplaying the arbitrary July 2011 timeline for U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan will bolster the counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan and increase the chances of convincing Pakistan to shift its calculations on how best to ensure protection of its own regional security interests.

U.S. forces Commander in Afghanistan General David Petraeus's counterinsurgency strategy in order to undo the damage caused by the specter of a premature U.S. withdrawal that lingered in the region last year. As the International Crisis Group noted in a November 2010 report, "Whatever policy there was has been totally undercut by [President Barack] Obama's call for a July 2011 drawdown, which erased any belief on the ground that there was a commitment to stay the course."¹

The uncertainty created by the timeline complicated U.S. efforts to work with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who lost faith in the U.S. as a reliable partner. Another devastating result of the July 2011 drawdown announcement was to weaken Pakistan's resolve to fight extremists on its territory. The announcement of a withdrawal date discouraged Pakistan from breaking ties with its former Taliban proxies, on whom it believes it would need to rely in the event that coalition forces depart the region prematurely.² Downplaying the arbitrary July 2011 timeline for U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan will bolster the counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan and increase the chances of convincing Pakistan to shift its calculations on how best to ensure protection of its own regional security interests.

Aligning U.S. and Pakistani Goals in Afghanistan

Even with more time on the clock, increasing U.S.–Pakistan cooperation in denying the Taliban

1. "Afghanistan: Exit vs Engagement," International Crisis Group Asia Briefing No. 115, November 28, 2010, p. 4, at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/B115-afghanistan-exit-vs-engagement.aspx> (March 10, 2011).
2. Lt. Gen. David Barno, USA (Ret.), and Andrew Exum, "Responsible Transition: Securing U.S. Interests in Afghanistan Beyond 2011," Center for a New American Security, December 7, 2010, p. 22, at <http://www.cnas.org/node/5403> (March 10, 2011).

safe haven on Pakistani territory is no easy task. Pakistani military leaders play for high stakes with their Afghanistan policy, and they are well aware that the U.S. is highly dependent on supply lines that run through Pakistan. Furthermore, the U.S. relies on Pakistan for valuable counterterrorism cooperation and has a vested interest in ensuring that the nuclear-armed state does not further destabilize. Thus, the U.S. finds itself in a catch-22 situation in which it requires Pakistani cooperation to fight terrorism but fears pushing the Pakistani authorities too hard on the issue because such pressure could tip the balance in favor of hard-line anti-American forces.

The Afghan strategy review reveals significant gains against al-Qaeda's core leadership in Pakistan's tribal areas, thanks to an intensified drone campaign that has eliminated key leaders and disrupted the terrorists' ability to operate and train for attacks. Pakistani military operations in parts of the tribal border areas have also helped to degrade the overall militant threat in the region.

Pakistan has deployed some 140,000 troops along the border with Afghanistan and has suffered more than 2,500 casualties in military operations over the past five years. Throughout the country, the Pakistani population continues to suffer incessant terrorist attacks that claimed nearly 3,000 lives

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in 2010 alone. Nevertheless, there are indications that Pakistan's government continues to support the Afghan Taliban and is reluctant to take on Taliban-allied militants like the Jalaluddin Haqqani network in North Waziristan.

Differences between Washington and Islamabad over how to approach the militant sanctuaries in the tribal areas continue to create tension in the relationship. In congressional testimony last year, General Petraeus provided an assessment of the situation along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, describing the region as a terrorist safe haven occupied by al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and a "syndicate of militant groups" that are fighting against the people and governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan.³

The Pakistan military's policy of making distinctions among the various militant groups translates into a strategic blunder that has compromised Pakistan's military and, even more so, the stability of the state.

Pakistani leaders take a slightly different and less urgent view of the challenges in the region. Rather than viewing the various groups as connected and thus posing an existential threat to the country, Pakistani military strategists are more worried about India trying to encircle Pakistan by gaining influence in Afghanistan. They calculate that the Taliban and the Haqqani network offer the best chance of countering India's regional influence.

When asked last summer about the potential for Pakistan to take major military operations to North Waziristan (al-Qaeda and the Haqqani network's base), Muhammad Amir Rana, director of the Pak Institute for Peace Studies in Islamabad, told *The Washington Post* that this was unlikely since the *status quo* in the tribal areas works in Pakistan's favor. He said that Pakistan had an agreement with these groups and that they had refrained from conducting terrorist attacks inside Pakistan. Indeed, Rana indicated, the terrorists could be Pakistan's allies in Afghanistan at some point in the future, so it made no sense for the military to take them on at this point. The spokesman for Pakistan's military, Athar

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3. "The Posture of U.S. Central Command," statement by Gen. David Petraeus before the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate, March 16, 2010, at <http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2010/03%20March/Petraeus%2003-16-10.pdf> (March 10, 2011).
 4. Karen De Young and Griff Witte, "U.S., Pakistan Seek to Bridge Divide on North Waziristan," *The Washington Post*, April 14, 2010.

Abbas, provided different reasoning for Pakistan's ambivalence toward dealing with the terrorist base in North Waziristan, indicating the Pakistani military feared taking on too many fronts at once.⁴

However, Pakistani security officials' ambivalence toward some terrorist groups is putting them at a disadvantage when trying to stabilize and strengthen Pakistan's internal security. According to a report published by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, there is evidence of cooperation at the tactical level between factions of the Pakistani Taliban (which has conducted numerous suicide attacks throughout Pakistan since 2007) and factions of the Afghan insurgency. The report also notes evidence of Haqqani network members cooperating with the Pakistani Taliban to conduct kidnappings, which result in profits that the Paki-

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stani Taliban likely uses to attack military and civilian targets in Pakistan.⁵ These groups clearly see it in their interests to collaborate. Thus, the Pakistan military's policy of making distinctions among the various militant groups translates into a strategic blunder that has compromised Pakistan's military and, even more so, the stability of the state.

It is too early to tell what impact U.S. and coalition progress in Afghanistan may have on Pakistani calculations with regard to the Taliban and related militant networks. U.S. policymakers expect that coalition gains in Afghanistan will encourage Pakistan to crack down on the Taliban elements on their side of the border, but this may be wishful thinking. Given that the India factor is what largely drives

Pakistani support for these groups, Islamabad may allow Taliban and other militants to retreat onto Pakistani territory.

Some analysts suggest that it is possible to make significant progress in Afghanistan without uprooting Taliban sanctuaries on Pakistan's side of the border. Such Afghan progress would likely be unsustainable over time, however. Only a decisive shift in the Pakistani security forces' posture toward the militant groups to one of "comprehensive intolerance" can ensure that any progress in Afghanistan is long-term.

The U.S. Should Drive Reconciliation

The Obama Administration must actively counter the perception that the U.S. is war-weary and ready to strike a grand bargain with the Taliban. Such perceptions weaken the U.S. position in the region and dampen prospects for the counterinsurgency strategy's overall success. The U.S. must instead continue to assert a vision for the region that strengthens those who support democracy, human rights, and religious pluralism and weakens those who adhere to destructive, extremist ideologies.

The debacle in which President Karzai, with support from NATO, was duped into negotiating with a Taliban impostor last fall demonstrates that the U.S. and coalition strategy for political reconciliation is still at the early stages and requires more serious attention. Media reports from last November indicate that a Pakistani shopkeeper from Quetta claimed to be Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, the second-ranking Taliban commander after Mullah Omar, and met with President Karzai to discuss possible peace negotiations. The impostor was apparently flown to Kabul on British military aircraft and paid large sums of money before Afghan officials determined his true identity.⁶

There has been speculation in the media that the U.S. is engaged in direct, secret talks with the Taliban.⁷ On February 18 of this year, Secretary of

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5. Gretchen Peters, "Crime and Insurgency in the Tribal Areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, October 2010, p. 92.
 6. Dexter Filkins and Carlotta Gall, "Taliban Leader in Secret Talks Was an Impostor," *The New York Times*, November 22, 2010, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/23/world/asia/23kabul.html> (March 20, 2011).
 7. Steve Coll, "U.S.-Taliban Talks," *The New Yorker*, February 28, 2011, at http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2011/02/28/110228taco_talk_coll (March 10, 2011).

State Hillary Clinton provided a clear-cut choice to the Taliban: “Break ties with al-Qaeda, give up your arms, and abide by the Afghan constitution and you can rejoin Afghan society; refuse and you will continue to face the consequences of being tied to al-Qaeda as an enemy of the international community.” Providing further hints about U.S. expectations from any negotiations, Clinton stated that:

All parties will have to commit to a pluralistic system that respects the human rights of every Afghan.... We will not abandon our values or support a political process that undoes the social progress that has been made in the past decade.... [T]he potential for sustainable peace would be subverted, if women are silenced or marginalized.⁸

While the Afghan government should take the lead in any negotiations with the Taliban and Pakistan, the U.S. must be actively involved in the reconciliation process. There are concerns in Afghanistan about the bilateral track of negotiations between Islamabad and Kabul. President Karzai’s efforts to promote reconciliation have been somewhat inconsistent and threaten to inflame ethnic tensions among groups who fear that he will not protect their interests.⁹ There is a widespread perception that Karzai’s firing last summer of two senior government officials, Amrullah Saleh and Hanif Atmar, was at the behest of Islamabad, which viewed them as obstructionist and anti-Pakistan.¹⁰ Pakistan believes that ethnic Tajiks and other members of the former “Northern Alliance” in the Afghan government receive support from New Delhi and that India foments separatism in Pakistan’s Baluchistan province through its Afghan consulates near the Pakistan border.

As the U.S. drives a genuine reconciliation process, it should continue to encourage the broader

Afghan–Pakistani peace track. In early January, Afghanistan’s High Peace Council, led by former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, visited Pakistan, where Rabbani met with Pakistani Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Kayani. During his visit, Rabbani struck a conciliatory tone, declaring that “no third country would be allowed to damage Afghanistan–Pakistan relations” and that Afghans “would never allow their soil to be used against Pakistan.” The recent ratification of the long-pending Afghanistan–Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement is a major milestone in beginning to normalize rela-

India’s support for building up Afghanistan’s democratic institutions and economic infrastructure contributes to the U.S. and NATO’s goal of stabilizing the country over the long term.

tions between the two countries.¹¹ The agreement is expected to increase trade and investment opportunities in both countries.

Addressing Pakistani regional security concerns *vis-à-vis* India will necessarily be part of any reconciliation process. Asia specialist Dan Twining recommends establishing a transparent system of agreed-upon red lines to govern how India and Pakistan exercise influence in Afghanistan.¹² Now that their official dialogue has resumed, there is an opportunity for Islamabad and New Delhi to start a serious discussion on Afghanistan.

Pakistani claims about growing Indian influence in Afghanistan are often overstated. Moreover, Pakistani officials’ complaints about India’s burgeoning role in Afghanistan overlook the fact that India has legitimate security interests in Afghanistan and the right to extend its influence in the country. Indeed,

8. Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks at the Launch of the Asia Society’s Series of Richard C. Holbrooke Memorial Addresses,” U.S. Department of State, February 18, 2011, at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/02/156815.htm> (March 10, 2011).

9. “Afghanistan: Exit vs Engagement,” p. 8.

10. *Ibid.*

11. S. Frederick Starr, “Afghanistan Beyond the Fog of Nation Building: Giving Economic Strategy a Chance,” Central Asia–Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, January 2011, p. 17, at <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1101Afghanistan-Starr.pdf> (March 10, 2011).

12. Daniel Twining, “Reversing Pakistan’s Sponsorship of Militancy: A Strategy to Alter the Logic of Pakistan’s Use of Terrorist Groups as a Tool of Statecraft,” *Counterterrorism in South Asia*, ORF–Heritage Foundation New Delhi Dialogue, 2010, p. 198.

India's support for building up Afghanistan's democratic institutions and economic infrastructure contributes to the U.S. and NATO's goal of stabilizing the country over the long term. Still, a sustained and multifaceted Indo-Pakistani dialogue that includes Afghanistan as a topic of discussion could help to defuse tensions and reduce Pakistani fears of India's regional influence.

Splitting the Taliban from al-Qaeda: Pakistani Cooperation Needed

The fundamental question is whether the Taliban and al-Qaeda can be split apart after supporting each other on the battlefield for the past several years. The Taliban have benefited significantly from their relationship with al-Qaeda, receiving strategic direction and ideological inspiration, access to international financial networks, and recruits and training for suicide attacks inside Afghanistan.¹³

Some indications point to a Taliban leadership that has become so fused with al-Qaeda and its virulently anti-West, pan-Islamic ideology that it would be nearly impossible for the leadership to break those ties without losing its *raison d'être*.¹⁴ Other analysts argue, however, that the Taliban and al-Qaeda have differing goals and ideologies and that friction exists between them.¹⁵

Officials within Pakistan's military and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency likely understand better than anyone else how to break apart the Taliban-Haqqani-al-Qaeda nexus. ISI has had close relationships with members of these groups

for three decades and likely has a well-developed understanding of the dynamics among the organizations and the strengths and weaknesses of each of the groups' leaders. As Secretary Clinton noted on February 18, "For reconciliation to succeed, Pakistan will have to be part of the process. It will have to respect Afghan sovereignty and work with Afghanistan to improve regional stability."¹⁶

The Other Regional Players

While the U.S. seeks to convince Pakistan to crack down on the Taliban and related extremists, it should also work with other regional players interested in Afghan stability, particularly the Central Asian states, India, Russia, and China. Some analysts argue that, given the history of outside interference in Afghanistan, a regional solution involving these other nations is the *only* way to guarantee stability in the country over the long run.

Washington must also continue to build up the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) in order to reduce its dependence on Pakistani territory as a means of resupply for U.S. troops in Afghanistan.¹⁷ The NDN currently supports the transit of about half of all resupply cargo to Afghanistan.¹⁸ The U.S. has already opened five supply routes from countries north of Afghanistan, and a more robust dialogue with Russia could help the U.S. to secure even more routes through the north, thus reducing its dependence on Pakistan.¹⁹

Central Asian States. The Central Asian republics by and large support the U.S. goal of promoting

13. Lisa Curtis, "Taliban Reconciliation: Obama Administration Must Be Clear and Firm," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2384, March 11, 2010, at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2010/03/taliban-reconciliation-obama-administration-must-be-clear-and-firm>.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, "Separating the Taliban from al-Qaeda: The Core of Success in Afghanistan," New York University Center on International Cooperation, February 2011, at http://www.cic.nyu.edu/afghanistan/docs/gregg_sep_tal_alqaeda.pdf (March 10, 2011).

16. Clinton, "Remarks at the Launch of the Asia Society's Series of Richard C. Holbrooke Memorial Addresses."

17. The Northern Distribution Network is a U.S. logistical corridor connecting the Baltic and Black Sea ports with Afghanistan via Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. States currently involved in the Northern Distribution Network are Latvia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

18. "The Posture of U.S. Central Command," Statement by General James N. Mattis, U.S. Marine Corps Commander, U.S. Central Command, before the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate, March 1, 2011.

19. William Branigin, "U.S. Shift from Iraq to Afghanistan Presents Massive Logistical Operation for Army," *The Washington Post*, April 2, 2010.

stability in Afghanistan, but each country has varied in the degree to which it offers its territory to facilitate U.S. logistics and supply into Afghanistan. Russian pressure to limit U.S. presence in Eurasia and American support for human rights and democracy are the defining factors that limit the Central Asian regimes' cooperation with the U.S.

Moscow's deeply held resentment at being defeated by the U.S.-supported mujahideen in Afghanistan in the 1980s and its suspicions of current NATO involvement in the region affect its calculations on Afghanistan policy.

After first having shut down the American air base at Karshi-Khanabad in 2005 after the Andijian Revolt, the Uzbek government agreed in 2009 to allow U.S. non-military supplies to pass through Uzbekistan to Afghanistan. Uzbekistan is also extending its rail system to Mazar-e-Sharif and sending electricity to Kabul.²⁰

Kyrgyzstan's President Kurmanbek Bakiyev forced the U.S. to triple its payment for use of its Manas Air Base near Bishkek in 2009 after going back on a promise to Moscow to shut down the base altogether. Moscow repeatedly pressured Kyrgyzstan to shut down Manas, or at least control the fuel supply to the base. The base is used for transport, refueling, and supply. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan allow U.S. overflight for humanitarian missions.

Russia. Russia is critical to establishing an effective Northern Distribution Network. Moscow has an interest in seeing a stable Afghanistan in which Islamist extremism is contained. Russian territory has been targeted by Islamist extremists and terrorists that receive foreign financing and training.

At the same time, Moscow's deeply held resentment at being defeated by the U.S.-supported *mujahideen* in Afghanistan in the 1980s and its suspicions of current NATO involvement in the region affect its calculations on Afghanistan policy.²¹ Rus-

sia considers the Central Asian states its "exclusive sphere of national interests," to use President Dmitry Medvedev's term, and is generally opposed to these countries negotiating separate deals with the U.S. During the 2009 Obama–Medvedev summit, Russia agreed to allow overflight of its territory for U.S. weapons transports to Afghanistan.

India. India has consciously strengthened its traditionally cordial ties to Afghanistan over the past six years and is now a major donor for the country's reconstruction, pledging over \$1.3 billion. New Delhi has developed a wide array of political contacts and provided assistance for the new parliament building, a major highway in Nimruz Province, and a major electricity project in Kabul. India has invested in the Iranian port at Charbahar to gain trading access to Afghanistan, given Pakistani reluctance to allow Indian goods to transit Pakistan.

An estimated 4,000 Indians are working on development projects in Afghanistan. India has sent about 500 Indo–Tibetan border police to guard its workers. There have been four major attacks on Indian interests in Afghanistan in the past two and a half years, including a 2008 suicide bombing of the embassy that killed two senior Indian officials and reportedly was backed by Pakistani intelligence and an attack on a guesthouse in Kabul in 2010 that killed seven Indian citizens. Indian officials blamed the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Tayyiba terrorist group for that attack.

China. While China is wary of a long-term U.S. military presence in the region, the volatile situation with its Muslim Uighur population in the western Xinjiang province bordering Afghanistan plays a role in its policy toward Kabul. China won a \$3.5 billion contract to develop the Aynak copper field in Afghanistan in 2008, marking the largest foreign direct investment in the country's history.

The Chinese government is reportedly "studying" the U.S. proposal for Beijing to participate in the Northern Distribution Network.²² While China has shown commercial interest in Afghanistan and

20. Starr, "Afghanistan Beyond the Fog of Nation Building," p. 12.

21. Andrew C. Kuchins and Thomas M. Sanderson, "The Northern Distribution Network and Afghanistan: Geopolitical Challenges and Opportunities," *CSIS Report*, January 2010, pp. 2–3.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

may be willing to increase its economic stake in the country, thus facilitating economic development and stabilization, Beijing has been unwilling to assist U.S. and NATO forces directly.

Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has a long history of involvement in Afghanistan. The Saudis provided significant financial support to the *mujahideen* in the 1980s. Riyadh also supported the Taliban when they controlled Afghanistan in the mid-to-late 1990s and was one of only three countries, including Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates, to recognize the Taliban government officially.

The Saudis and the U.S. have differing goals in Afghanistan; the Saudis would support an Islamic government that enforces strict moral codes and thus would likely not share U.S. concerns about ethnic minority and women's rights.²³ The Saudis are pre-occupied with denying Iran influence in Afghanistan and view with suspicion any Iranian involvement in the country. U.S. engagement with Saudi Arabia on Afghanistan has been limited primarily to stemming illicit money flows to the Taliban, although there are indications that the U.S. is seeking to raise Afghanistan as a higher priority in its bilateral discussions with Saudi officials in an effort to leverage Saudi Arabia's influence in the region.²⁴

Iran. There is good reason to believe that Iran does not want a stable U.S.-aligned Afghanistan to emerge from the current fighting. Such a state would be an obstacle to the establishment of Iranian regional hegemony and could assist possible future efforts to undermine the Iranian regime.

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates has accused Iran of playing a "double game" of both supporting the Afghan government and providing assistance to the Taliban, while Chairman of the Joint Chiefs

Iran is carefully watching the action unfolding in Afghanistan and is looking for an opportunity to expel American influence and increase its regional geopolitical profile.

of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen acknowledged last year that a "significant shipment of weapons" had moved from Iran into Kandahar.²⁵ These accusations show that Iran is carefully watching the action unfolding in Afghanistan and is looking for an opportunity to expel American influence and increase its regional geopolitical profile. Former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Zhamay Khalilzad says that Iran may use western Afghanistan as a "bargaining chip" if conflict should erupt over its nuclear ambitions.²⁶

At the same time, Iran is worried about Sunni extremism, hostile warlords, and cross-border drug-trafficking and has taken action to protect its porous border with Afghanistan.²⁷ Afghanistan's opium trade has helped to create an estimated 4 million to 5 million Iranian drug addicts. Iran therefore has a vested interest in cooperating with the Afghan government to secure the border and reduce drug smuggling, but Tehran would prefer a weak and pliable Afghan government that would be open to Iranian influence. For this reason, it would like to see a U.S. military defeat in Afghanistan and a United Nations-led effort to stabilize the country, thus minimizing U.S. influence in the region.

Progress on Training Afghan Forces

The creation of a functional, non-corrupt security apparatus is essential for a successful counter-insurgency strategy and the long-term creation of

23. Christopher Boucek, "Saudi Arabia," in *Is a Regional Strategy Viable in Afghanistan?* ed. Ashley J. Tellis and Aroop Mukharji, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 2010, p. 46.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

25. "Gates Warns Iran Over Afghan 'Double Game,'" CBS News, March 8, 2010, at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/03/08/world/main6277025.shtml> (March 10, 2011), and "U.S. Says Weapons from Iran Sent to Afghanistan," Reuters, March 31, 2010, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE62U33L20100331> (March 10, 2011).

26. "Iran Pours Cash into Afghanistan, Seeking Leverage Against U.S.," Bloomberg, July 16, 2008, at <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=aNaIqaODpvrU&refer=home> (March 10, 2011).

27. George Gavrilis, "Harnessing Iran's Role in Afghanistan," Council on Foreign Relations *Expert Brief*, June 5, 2009, at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/19562/> (March 10, 2011).

an Afghan identity. Stepped-up U.S. and coalition efforts to train Afghan forces have put the country on track to meet the target of 171,000 soldiers and 134,000 police by October 2011.

However, in order to shift responsibility for the country's security fully to the Afghans, NATO has had to confront the daunting prospect of generating a professional Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) almost from scratch. The challenge of standing up a new self-sustaining army, police force, border force, air force, and paramilitary-style police force has been complicated by Afghanistan's extraordinarily low literacy rates and years of brutal Taliban rule during which professional skills and judicial rule were practically nonexistent.

The creation of a functional, non-corrupt security apparatus is essential for a successful counterinsurgency strategy and the long-term creation of an Afghan identity.

Initial training efforts were beset by what the commander of the recently established NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A), General William Caldwell, described as “a lack of unity of effort.”²⁸ In 2001, Germany assumed responsibility for leading police reform but grossly underestimated the systemic corruption and chronic illiteracy rates among police recruits. With too few trainers and limited resources, Germany's initial efforts did not produce meaningful results. Since 2001, the United Nations, the U.S. Department of Defense, the European Union, individual European nations, and Provincial Reconstruction Teams have all staked a claim in the training of the Afghan National Army (ANA) or the Afghan National Police (ANP), each with separate training standards and separate instructions from their national capitals.

The NTM-A was established on November 21, 2009, to address this lack of unity and to take charge of the 19 countries involved in training all branches of the ANSF. Although some national contingents—such as the German police training mission in Mazar-e-Sharif or the EU Police (EUPOL) Training Mission-Afghanistan—will not subsume their efforts under the command of the NTM-A for political or constitutional reasons, NTM-A is at least coordinating national contributions and directing training missions in a less duplicative fashion. It has created a program to “train the trainers” and has established a streamlined program of instruction on basic soldiering and police skills so that all trainers can teach a single curriculum.

However, General Caldwell states that he is still discovering separate training programs across the country that do not coordinate with NTM-A. This undermines NATO's effort to bring coherence to this huge endeavor.²⁹

Upon its establishment in November 2009, NTM-A outlined a two-pronged strategy. First, it concentrated on force-generation issues—recruiting sufficient numbers of trainees to form a credible national army and national police force. Second, NTM-A turned its attention to the professionalization of the ANSF—investing in leadership development to create an Afghan officer class, which is necessary to sustain the force over the long term.

Police. The scale of the challenge of training a professional police force was outlined by General Caldwell last September when he noted that most police recruits had never driven a vehicle or loaded a gun.³⁰ Illiteracy is a major problem as recruits are unable to read even basic numbers, let alone take statements and file intelligence reports. Since the ANP and the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP)³¹ are also bearing the brunt of the insur-

28. Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV and Nathan K. Finney, “Building Police Capacity in Afghanistan: The Challenges of a Multilateral Approach,” *PRISM*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (December 2010), pp. 121–130, at http://www.ndu.edu/press/lib/images/prism2-1/Prism_121-130_Caldwell-Finney.pdf (March 10, 2011).

29. *Ibid.*

30. Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV, “No Trainers, No Transition: Address to the NATO Military Committee,” NTM-A, September 27, 2010, at <http://ntm-a.com/caldwell/speeches/1433-no-trainers-no-transition-address-to-the-nato-military-committee?lang> (March 10, 2011).

gency in many areas—with leave periods haphazard and unpredictable—attrition rates present a huge obstacle to the growth of the ANP. Current attrition rates are 47 percent for the ANP³² and as high as 70 percent for ANCOP.³³

In 2007, the European Union took over German-led training of the Afghan police. Over the past decade, the EU has stated that civilian training missions are the types of missions that are perfectly suited to its Common Security and Defense Policy. However, in February 2011, Britain's House of Lords European Union Committee released a damning report on the €54.6 million (\$75.6 million) per year EUPOL mission, stating that it is at real risk of failing.³⁴ Echoing criticisms from a 2008 NATO Parliamentary Assembly report,³⁵ the House of Lords concluded that EUPOL-Afghanistan was too small, too bureaucratic, too disconnected from NATO, too geographically restricted (largely to Kabul), and unlikely to succeed in its overall mission of achieving a literate, non-corrupt Afghan police force. The report states that:

[Training Afghan police] was an opportunity for Europe to pull its weight in Afghanistan in a discipline and skills area where it had great expertise. In this, despite the dedication and risks taken by those on the ground, the EU's Member States have not yet succeeded. Not only was the resource allocation of 400 staff in practice woefully inadequate for this important task, [but] the fact that even those numbers have never been met has

Afghan National Police professionalism will develop only when there is an attitudinal change among recruits: when they feel they are a professional group of law enforcement officials working in the service of their country.

undermined the reputation of the mission. As military withdrawal deadlines approach, the dedication of much more resources will be necessary if the mission is to be able to achieve its aims. This has been a troubled mission undertaking a vital task in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Despite achieving local successes, overall there is a strong risk of failure.³⁶

As a result, NTM-A has taken the lead for Afghan National Police training. It has begun by investing significant resources in improving literacy skills and marksmanship among ANP recruits.³⁷ Recruits are now required to complete 64 hours of mandatory literacy instruction. In 2011, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) community and the United Nations will need to provide more literacy teachers if this effort is to be successful. Mobile police-training teams are also being deployed into the field to “back-train” previous recruits who have not had the levels of training required of new recruits. This puts greater pressure on already overburdened NATO trainers, interpreters, literacy teachers, and other key enablers.

31. ANCOP is a special police unit whose mission is to provide civil order patrols, prevent violent public incidents, and provide crisis response in urban areas.

32. Elisabeth Bumiller, “U.S. General Cites Goals to Train Afghan Forces,” *The New York Times*, August 23, 2010, at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/24/world/asia/24military.html?_r=2&hp (March 10, 2011).

33. Lynne O'Donnell, “Six Months into Training, Afghan Policemen Struggle,” Agence France-Presse, May 30, 2010, at <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iqDMZjM6MGVQygjPnsVwU118XoA> (March 10, 2011).

34. House of Lords, European Union Committee, *The EU's Afghan Police Mission: Report with Evidence*, HL Paper 87, February 16, 2011, at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldselect/ldeucom/87/87.pdf> (March 10, 2011).

35. NATO Parliamentary Assembly, “NATO Operations: Current Priorities and Lessons Learned,” 158 DSC 08 E bis, 2008 Annual Session, at <http://www.nato-pa.int/Default.asp?CAT2=1458&CAT1=16&CAT0=2&COM=1476&MOD=0&SMD=0&SSMD=0&STA=&ID=0&PAR=0&PRINT=1> (March 10, 2011).

36. House of Lords, *The EU's Afghan Police Mission*.

37. Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV, “Speech to the High Level Interministerial Committee of the European Gendarmerie Force,” NTM-A, May 20, 2010, at <http://ntm-a.com/caldwell/speeches/721-speech-to-the-high-level-interministerial-committee-of-the-european-gendarmerie-force?lang> (March 10, 2011).

NTM-A has begun slowly to chip away at the rampant corruption that has scarred prior police training. For example, the fuel used in police cars is dyed so that it can be easily identified if it is stolen; a portion of the recruit's paycheck is sent directly to his family so that it cannot be stolen by corrupt commanders; the location of a recruit's training is determined by lottery rather than by bribe; police pay has been increased and is equivalent to that of ANA recruits; policemen who work in the more dangerous areas of the country receive hazardous duty pay; rotational leave has been introduced so that policemen can now predict break periods more accurately; and as the ANP grows in numbers, time can now be set aside for additional training periods for more advanced recruits.

NATO is expanding the Afghan National Army at a phenomenal rate, and ANA training has been a greater success than ANP training has been.

General Caldwell states that ANP professionalism will develop only when there is an attitudinal change among recruits: when they feel they are a professional group of law enforcement officials working in the service of their country. Mentoring ANP recruits once they are deployed is important to enforce standards in the field and raise the professionalism of the service. Additional Police Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (POMLTs) are desperately needed to guide new recruits who have completed their training. Complementing recruits' training with long-term career development and training in officer candidate school and established institutions is another element of creating a self-sustaining force.

The current goals for the ANP are 120,000 police by March 2011 and 134,000 by October 2011. Outlining his specific needs in order to fulfill this goal, Caldwell has called for more training centers across

the country, greater direction from the Afghan Ministry of Interior, and a stronger officer class within the ranks of the ANP.³⁸

To train a professional Afghan police force, NTM-A needs police-training centers throughout the country, not just those restricted to the relative safe-zone of Kabul and staffed with qualified police instructors provided by individual European governments. Contractors who have been recruited to backfill gaps in NTM-A requirements are not a long-term alternative to the high-quality European trainers who have operational experience. NTM-A also needs trainers to commit to longer rotations so that they can mentor recruits into the field. The short-term deployments for many NATO member states have hampered the continuity of training by the NTM-A.

Army. NATO is expanding the Afghan National Army at a phenomenal rate, and ANA training has been a greater success than ANP training has been. It is estimated that development of the ANA is 18 months ahead of development of the ANP, with far lower attrition rates.³⁹ Once again, however, the greatest challenge for the NTM-A is the shortage of trainers from International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) members. Europe has not sent nearly as many trainers as the U.S. expected or requested, and President Obama has mirrored former President George W. Bush's repeated requests for additional trainers from his NATO partners. Far too much training is performed by contractors because of a shortage of NATO-supplied trainers. However, contractors have not performed to the levels necessary to create a self-sustaining ANA.⁴⁰

Afghan soldiers receive approximately \$165 per month and up to \$240 per month in hazardous areas such as Helmand.⁴¹ NTM-A has focused on improving basic soldiering skills as well as on improving leadership development.⁴² All recruits receive literacy and weapons training, after which

38. *Ibid.*

39. Lt. Col. Todd M. Manyx, "NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan," *Marine Corps Gazette*, July 2010, at <http://www.marinecorpsgazette-digital.com/marinecorpsgazette/201007/?pg=4#pg17> (March 10, 2011).

40. Caldwell, "No Trainers, No Transition."

41. Bumiller, "U.S. General Cites Goals to Train Afghan Forces."

some recruits are selected for greater professional development. As with the ANP, NTM-A wants to inculcate “an ethos of service and loyalty” through professional-development facilities, such as the National Military Academy of Afghanistan.⁴³

Again, mentoring in the field is essential to holding new recruits accountable and aiding them through the initial transition from recruit to soldier. Battle-tested soldiers who have served in war zones are able to mentor units from the schoolroom to the battlefield and do “on-the-job” training. More Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) are therefore needed, as well as new equipment and combat enablers such as surveillance and reconnaissance teams, explosives ordnance disposal experts, and medical personnel.

Vital Steps for the U.S.

In order to build on the recent security gains, the U.S. must energize a political strategy for Afghanistan that is supported by Pakistan and other key regional players. The U.S. must also maintain momentum in training Afghan security forces and refine its aid strategies in the region. More specifically, the U.S. should:

Sharpen diplomacy toward Pakistan. The Administration must make it a priority to develop a strategy that will align the U.S. and Pakistani visions for the future of Afghanistan more closely. The U.S. can do this only if it demonstrates a willingness to make a long-term commitment to the region. Any progress on the Afghan battlefield will not be sustainable over the long term unless there is a decisive shift in the Pakistani security forces’ posture toward the militant groups on their side of the border to one of “comprehensive intolerance.”

As part of this effort, the U.S. must demonstrate that a continuing Pakistani policy of supporting the Afghan Taliban and Jalaluddin Haqqani network will come at a cost to Pakistan’s foreign policy interests. The U.S. must be willing to use its leverage with Pakistan—both America’s influence on global opinion toward Pakistan and its substantial eco-

nomical and military aid—to convince the Pakistani military to shift its strategy in Afghanistan so that it does not invest in the Taliban and instead develops political alternatives. Washington should make clear to Islamabad that it is prepared to devote substantial military, economic, and diplomatic resources to both Afghanistan and Pakistan to prevent the return of a Taliban-dominated Afghanistan. Washington must make equally clear that it is prepared to withdraw assistance to Islamabad if Pakistan fails to demonstrate commitment to the same goal.

The U.S. should recognize that the Pakistani military’s ability to make strategic decisions in the interest of long-term stability in Pakistan is clouded at present by its fixation on India. A sustained and multifaceted Indo–Pakistani dialogue could help to reduce Pakistani fears of India’s regional influence. Ultimately, Pakistani strategists must recognize that a robust economy and a moderate and cohesive society provide the most assured path to maintaining Pakistan’s national strength and regional influence, but these goals will remain elusive so long as Pakistan tolerates extremism and fails to enforce the rule of law against terrorists and their supporters.

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To facilitate a transition to a policy of comprehensively cracking down on the Taliban and related militant groups, the Pakistani leadership must alter the narrative it has developed about Afghanistan and the region over the past several years. The new narrative must acknowledge Pakistani shortcomings in stanching the terrorist threat and reduce the level of blame on U.S. policies in the region for Pakistan’s current woes.

Enlist more NATO aid for training Afghan forces. In order to achieve projected levels of

42. Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV, “Update on Progress—and Challenges—in Developing an Afghan Security Force,” The Wonk Room, September 6, 2010, at <http://wonkroom.thinkprogress.org/2010/09/06/caldwell-an-enduring-force> (March 10, 2011).

43. *Ibid.*

growth within the ANSF and to address the three key challenges facing the NTM-A—developing leaders, stemming attrition, and improving literacy rates for 100,000 recruits by summer 2011—mentors, trainers, embedded training teams, and equipment are needed from a great number of NATO members. The U.S. cannot be expected to bear the entire burden of the NTM-A.

A number of countries have the capacity to staff additional OMLTs and POMLTs in Afghanistan, as several nations committed to do at the NATO summit in Lisbon last November. Although it withdrew its combat troops last year, Canada pledged to deploy a 700-strong training mission with 200 additional support troops. Italy, Portugal, Croatia, and Bulgaria also announced relatively small increases

There are budgetary pressures to reduce U.S. foreign aid, but robust civilian assistance to both Afghanistan and Pakistan is necessary to the overall counterterrorism strategy in the region.

in their number of mentoring and training teams.⁴⁴ It is critical that these nations make good on their pledges. Those members of the alliance that have comparably small deployments—Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Spain, and Turkey—should also provide additional deployments.

Many European NATO members also have home guard, paramilitary, and armed police resources that could provide the civil–military and paramilitary police training needed for ANCOF. These include the Luxembourgian Gendarmerie, the Dutch Paramilitary Royal Military Constabulary, the Slovenian Armed Paramilitary Police and Reservists, the Romanian Gendarmerie, the Spanish Guardia Civil, and the Turkish Gendarmerie/National Guard and Reservists.

Maintain U.S. troop levels until progress is solid and irreversible. The Obama Administration

has indicated that any troop withdrawals this summer would be driven by conditions on the ground. U.S. and NATO Commander in Afghanistan General David Petraeus is best placed to determine whether conditions on the ground merit troop redeployments. While the recent progress in the South is encouraging, it is too early to tell whether the progress is sustainable through the spring and summer, when fighting traditionally picks up.

Maintain civilian aid and improve accountability. There are budgetary pressures to reduce U.S. foreign aid, but robust civilian assistance to both Afghanistan and Pakistan is necessary to the overall counterterrorism strategy in the region. There is a need to improve the way U.S. aid is distributed, particularly in Pakistan, and to sharpen accountability and monitoring mechanisms. The U.S. has provided more than \$6 billion in economic assistance to Pakistan over the past nine years, but Pakistanis complain that there is little to show for it.

A recent Government Accountability Office report on U.S. civilian assistance to Pakistan recommends several steps to improve the monitoring and accountability of U.S. aid to Pakistan, including requiring Pakistani organizations that receive contracts or grants to implement a conflict-of-interest policy, recruit more qualified internal audit and procurement staff, embed approved certified public accountants, and participate in a capacity-building program.⁴⁵ While it is helpful that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) wants to channel more of its aid to local NGOs, USAID must pay more attention to the absorptive capacity of these local NGOs. U.S. aid levels to individual organizations should reflect the NGO's ability to absorb the aid, not Washington-driven political expediencies.

Pakistan is facing a youth bulge that requires innovative solutions to enhance skills and create jobs. The U.S. can play a positive role by helping private companies to expand and find and train young

44. "Afghanistan: Monthly Progress Report November 2010," Defence Viewpoints, at <http://www.defenceviewpoints.co.uk/military-operations/afghanistan-monthly-progress-report-november-2010> (March 10, 2011).

45. U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Department of State's Report to Congress and U.S. Oversight of Civilian Assistance to Pakistan Can Be Further Enhanced," GAO-11-310R, February 17, 2011, at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d11310r.pdf> (March 10, 2011).

workers. The Pakistani–American Enterprise Fund Act, introduced last year by Senators John Kerry (D–MA) and Richard Lugar (R–IN), would use existing funds authorized under the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009 to provide direct financial capital and technical assistance to commercially viable small and medium businesses.⁴⁶ The fund should be used to assist individuals and firms that have not previously received assistance in order to ensure a broader set of genuinely viable recipients.

Enhance trade initiatives. The U.S. Congress should provide Pakistani textiles access to the U.S. market on favored terms. There are major disparities in the overall tariffs the U.S. places on Pakistan compared to other countries because Pakistan's economy is so highly dependent on textile exports, and the U.S. imposes higher tariffs on textiles than it does on other consumer goods. The textile sector employs nearly 40 percent of Pakistan's industrial labor force and accounts for 60 percent of its exports. Boosting Pakistan's textile industry would substantially increase the number of jobs and export revenues for Pakistan, thus improving the country's overall economic performance.

Improving trade ties also has the advantage of enhancing U.S.–Pakistani relations without creating a sense of dependence on the U.S. There is concern that Islamabad has become overly dependent on foreign aid, which is detrimental to the overall health of the economy and fosters resentment within the society toward the U.S.

Strengthen regional diplomacy. Now that the new Senior Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Marc Grossman, is in place, he must lead efforts to engage Afghanistan's neighbors in stabilizing Afghanistan. While it is not necessary to create a formal international compact among the regional

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players, it is important for Washington to prioritize the stabilization of Afghanistan in its bilateral relations with China, Russia, India, and the Central Asian republics. The U.S. must focus on convincing each of these countries that its interests intersect with those of the U.S. Washington must coax these countries into investing in economic endeavors in Afghanistan that will help it to become a trade corridor that connects the economies of South and East Asia to the markets and energy resources of Central and West Asia.

Conclusion

The current U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan, if fully resourced and given the appropriate amount of time, has a good chance of succeeding. By deploying 30,000 additional troops last year, the U.S. has begun to achieve gains, particularly in the Taliban's traditional strongholds in the South.

Now is not the time to begin large-scale troop withdrawals or cuts in civilian aid programs. Instead, the Administration must focus on leading a process of genuine political reconciliation, with help from Pakistan, to stabilize Afghanistan and reduce the chances that it will once again become a haven for international terrorists.

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46. Press release, "Kerry, Lugar Call for Pakistani–American Enterprise Fund," Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, July 29, 2010, at <http://foreign.senate.gov/press/chair/release/?id=7966cfa5-54a9-4986-a0e9-37af5527b9ae> (March 10, 2011).