

UNITED STATES STRATEGY AND AFGHAN NATIONAL SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

The United States attacked Afghanistan in October 2001, beginning the longest war in American history. Ten years later, on 22 June, 2011, Barack Obama announced that the United States would pull American troops out of Afghanistan. While

there is a failed government with instability in Afghanistan, the Taliban will remain powerful, carrying out criminal actions against the Afghan people and coalition forces.

After withdrawal of the American troops, Afghanistan will pose both challenges and opportunities in the region, but this will depend on America's crisis management in the region. This article analyzes the

new situation in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the impact the New Obama Strategy will have on Afghanistan's national security.

This research adopts a descriptive-analytic approach. It uses books and scholarly articles published in different scientific journals, as well as interviews from government sources and official news agencies.

KEYWORDS: *Afghanistan, new U.S. strategy, national security.*

Introduction

Afghanistan occupies a vital geostrategic position near such critical but unstable regions as the Persian Gulf and the Indo-Pakistani border. Indeed, the importance of Afghanistan may grow in coming years as Central Asia's oil and gas reserves, which are estimated to rival those of the North Sea, begin to play a major role in the world energy market. Afghanistan could prove to be a valuable corridor for this energy, as well as for access to markets in Central Asia. Afghanistan could also serve as a trade link between Central and South Asia. Instead, Afghanistan has proven to be an obstacle to this region's development: Afghanistan's leading exports to the area are drugs, arms, and Islamic radicalism. Iran's and Pakistan's competition over Afghanistan and for regional influence has resulted in their involvement on opposite sides in the ongoing struggle in Afghanistan. This involvement is a leading reason for the prolongation of the war.¹

The terrorist act on 11 September, 2001 in the U.S. led to a global war on terror during the time of the Bush government (2000-2008). The United States asked the Taliban government to hand over Osama bin Laden, leader of the al-Qa'eda organization, but the Taliban would not concede. The United States, with the support of NATO and some other allied countries, attacked Afghanistan in 2001. The Taliban government was ousted and a new regime was established in Kabul with Hamid Karzai as president. A new constitution was drawn up and passed, and presidential and parliamentary elections were held. Therefore, the democratic history of Afghanistan started with the adoption of presidential democracy.

The next U.S. president, Barack Obama, began pursuing a different strategy in Afghanistan in two phases. The first phase was carried out in the early stages of his presidency. President Obama conceded that the U.S.'s Afghan strategy had been allowed to drift and he accepted the fact that more troops were needed to tackle the insurgency. In February 2009, Mr. Obama authorized the deployment of an additional 17,000 combat troops to be based mainly in southern Afghanistan. On 27 March, he presented his new strategy for Afghanistan, which had been revised to include Pakistan.²

¹ [www.web.archive.org].

² See: *The Stationery Office, Global Security: Afghanistan and Pakistan, Eighth Report of Session 2008-09, Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence*, Parliament: House of Commons: Foreign Affairs Committee, Great Britain, 2009, available at [http://books.google.com/books?id=LEykWNn9-9EC&pg=PA70&dq=Obama+strategy+in+afghanistan&hl=en&ei=b6IeTt2NOs_GswaB-5D8AQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=10&ved=0CFoQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=Obama%20strategy%20in%20afghanistan&f=false].

In the second phase of Obama's strategy in Afghanistan, the U.S. administration refocused on economic assistance, allotting more than \$2.6 billion during 2009 and 2010 to the agricultural sector, on which approximately 80 percent of Afghans rely for their livelihood. In a revamped antidrug policy, the Obama administration emphasized interdiction and alternative livelihood programs aimed at targeting kingpins without angering farmers. The new approach is supported by an increase in the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's personnel, financial, and technical assistance to farmers. Even as these major new commitments were announced, President Obama also pledged that the increased U.S. military commitment would not be open-ended. The United States intended to begin transferring responsibility for security to Afghan forces in July 2011, although how quickly this process would occur would be determined by the conditions on the ground in Afghanistan. At the July 2010 Kabul conference, the parties expressed support of President Karzai's goal for the Afghan National Security Forces "to lead and conduct military operations in all provinces by the end of 2014."³

At the last stage of this phase in June 2011, President Obama announced withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan. He said that: "... We set clear objectives: to refocus on al-Qa'eda; reverse the Taliban's momentum; and train Afghan Security Forces to defend their own country. I also made it clear that our commitment would not be open-ended, and that we would begin to drawdown our forces this July... We are meeting our goals. As a result, starting next month, we will be able to remove 10,000 of our troops from Afghanistan by the end of this year, and we will bring home a total of 33,000 troops by next summer... After this initial reduction, our troops will continue coming home at a steady pace as Afghan Security forces move into the lead. Our mission will change from combat to support. By 2014, this process of transition will be complete, and the Afghan people will be responsible for their own security... This is the beginning— but not the end—of our effort to wind down this war. We will have to do the hard work of keeping the gains that we have made, while we drawdown our forces and transition responsibility for security to the Afghan government."⁴

This article focuses on the impact Obama's strategy will have on Afghanistan's situation in the future (will it be stable or not?) and the regional or other effective actors' reaction to the recent developments.

Conceptual Framework

There is a misconception about "state-building" and "nation-building." "Nation-building" refers to the creation of a cultural identity that relates to a particular territory of the state. Most theorists agree that a well-functioning state is a requirement of the development of a nation, and therefore most would agree that state-building is a necessary component of nation-building. Several authors argue that while state-building is something that external actors can engage in, the development of a cultural nation is inherently something only the emerging society itself can shape.⁵

As a fragile state, Afghanistan's political processes, political settlement, and state-society relations are at the heart of state-building. A central place is also held by building administrative and policy-making capacities for the state to perform its functions. State-building needs to be carried out from the national to the local level and legitimacy is crucial.

³ R.L. Armitage, S.R. Berger, D.S. Markey, *U.S. Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan*, Council on Foreign Relations, 2010.

⁴ "Text of President Obama's Speech on Afghanistan," 22 June, 2011, available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/23/world/asia/23obama-afghanistan-speech-text.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0].

⁵ See: Z. Scott, "Literature Review on State-Building," University of Birmingham, International Development Department, May 2007, p. 3, available at [www.gsdr.org/docs/open/HD528.pdf].

A donor framework for state-building can be outlined as follows:

- *Political processes and political settlement.* The historically specific balance of power and the mediations between state and society and their institutionalization.
- *Legitimacy and state legitimacy.* Right to rule and acceptance of governance.
- *Social expectations of the state and state functions.* The expectations of diverse groups and the state's ability to deliver.
- *Voice and exit.* Voice implies the opportunities and incentives for social actors to express their views in the public arena and be heard. Exit implies the opportunities and incentives for social actors to leave public authority and operate in alternative organizational arrangements.
- *Society and civil society.* Society refers to people living in communities in a geographical space. Civil society emerges in tandem with a law-bound state and includes, for example, professional, business, and community associations, worker- and gender-based organizations, and cause-oriented organizations. NGOs are only one part of civil society.
- *Technical assistance and capacity development.* Technical assistance, the largest part of donor assistance, is devoted to hiring consultants and experts. Capacity is the outcome of a wide range of processes, including donor intervention, comprising skills, knowledge, systems, and resources required to take action.⁶

Afghanistan's Political Processes after U.S. Withdrawal

Recent Developments on the Afghan Political Scene

Democratization has been playing an increasingly important role in post-conflict situations, facilitating the reconstruction of a country within a framework of stability and legitimacy. This approach is highlighted in the resurgence of the notion of Kantian democratic peace that formed Wilsonian idealism at the core of the League of Nations.⁷ Democracy is the best peace theory and the best way to shape a new order based on tolerance. Democratic institutions are the core and form the links in the democratization process in every country, and without them we cannot be hopeful and optimistic about continued stability and peace.

Rani Mullen believed that the Bonn Agreement set forth the framework for democratic rebuilding of the political institutions in the country, along with a timeframe for accomplishing democratic goals.⁸ The attempts by Afghan groups and external powers to establish a political authority in the

⁶ See: OECD, *State Building in Fragile Situations—How Can Donors 'Do No Harm' and Maximize their Positive Impact? Country Case Study—Rwanda*, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Joint Study by the London School of Economics and Price Water House Coopers LLP, July 2009, available at [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/30/54/45582738.pdf].

⁷ See: B. Pouligny, "Promoting Democratic Institutions in Post-conflict Societies: Giving Diversity a Chance," *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 7, Issue 3, 2000.

⁸ See: R.D. Mullen, "Democracy-Building at the Precipice in Afghanistan," *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 4, No. 1, July 2008, pp. 56-57.

new country are definitely positive. However, the Bonn Agreement delegates the task of establishing institutions to a limited group, and the groups participating in the Bonn process would not be sufficient to confer legitimacy on the political authority.

The current constitution was ratified by the People's Council and approved by President Karzai on 26 January, 2004. It introduced a bicameral presidency, an Islamic legal system, jurisdiction over legislation by the Supreme Court, a strong central government, and broad language rights for minorities. The ultimate objective of the Bonn process was to establish permanent government institutions; it was seen as a social contract that would provide the stability the country needed most.⁹ This is one side of the Afghanistan political scene envisaged on paper, but in reality this country's conditions are different.

Governance is the manner in which communities regulate themselves to preserve social order and maintain their security. Government is the action of ruling, the continuous exercise of state authority over the population it governs. While governments in the developed world are the unquestioned suppliers of governance to their local communities, this has not been the case historically in Afghanistan.¹⁰

In contrast to strong states, Afghanistan, as a failed state that is not a nation-state, cannot control its borders. The government has lost control over large areas of territory. Often the expression of official power is limited to the capital city and one or more ethnically specific zones. Indeed, one measure of the extent of a state's failure is how much of the state's geographical expanse the government genuinely controls.¹¹

Afghanistan's history espouses the experience of a strong society with a weak state. For many centuries, society in Afghanistan has had traditional elements of power—the people, an independent economy, and territory without foreign control. The government was born from tribal roots, which gave rise to such a phenomenon as warlordism.

Warlordism has continued, leading to insecurity and abuse of human rights in most parts of the country. According to Human Rights Watch annual report for 2005, "Political repression, human rights abuses, and criminal activity by warlords are consistently listed as the chief concerns of most Afghans." Such crimes include rape, murder, illegal detention, forced displacement, and human trafficking in women and children. All of this has severely damaged the legitimacy of the Karzai government and its foreign supporters and contributed to the resurgence of the Taliban insurgency.¹²

The Taliban on the New Afghan Political Scene after Withdrawal of the American Troops

There are two branches of the Taliban in this region. The first is the phenomenon of the Pakistan Taliban, referred to as the local Taliban in Pakistan. This is different from the Afghan

⁹ See: B. Aras, S. Toktas, "Afghanistan's Security: Political Process, State Building and Narcotics," Middle East Policy Council, Summer 2007, available at [<http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/afghanistans-security-political-process-state-building-and-narcotics>].

¹⁰ See: Th. Barfield, N. Nojumi, "Bringing More Effective Governance to Afghanistan: 10 Pathways to Stability," Middle East Policy Council, Winter 2009, available at [<http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/bringing-more-effective-governance-afghanistan-10-pathways-stability>].

¹¹ See: R.I. Rotberg, "The New Nature of Nation-State Failure," *The Washington Quarterly*, The Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Summer, 2002, p. 86.

¹² See: N. Lafraie, "Resurgence of the Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan: How and Why?" *International Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan), Vol. 46, No. 1, 2009, pp.104-105, available at [http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/JIRD_ResurgenceOfTaliban_Afghanistan.pdf].

Taliban led by Mullah Omar, who was the supreme leader in Afghanistan from 1994 to 2001. The Pakistan Taliban groups owe their allegiance to Mullah Omar of the Afghan Taliban and act within their command structure when fighting in Afghanistan against the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces. The Pakistan Taliban also considers itself to be part of the larger Taliban movement on both sides of the border. But it maintains separate structures vis-à-vis the Afghan Taliban. There are differences in strategy and targets between the two Talibans as well. Against the wishes of Mullah Omar, the Pakistan Taliban is involved in attacks against the Pakistani military and security forces inside Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban is very much focused on its fight in Afghanistan. On the contrary, the Pakistan Taliban subscribes to al-Qa'eda's broader agenda of global jihad.¹³ Pakistan's inability to control this region has led to a spread in insurgency against the Afghanistan government and a weakening of Afghan authority.

The Taliban resurgence in 2005 in the south and east of Afghanistan triggered a counter-insurgency war that has taken its toll not only among the international forces fighting in the region, but also within the civilian population, damaging the reputation of the central government and its international allies. During 2006, the Taliban managed to establish parallel jurisdictions in certain districts of the southern provinces Helmand and Kandahar. Profiting from the safe haven it enjoys in Pakistan's border regions, the Taliban has been exploiting the grievances of the rural population who suffer from the rampant lawlessness and poppy eradication policy that threatens their survival.¹⁴

The current resurgence of the Taliban is creating the greatest obstacle to consolidation of the central government, and the main future role for the Taliban is probably a negative sub-state actor. It is unlikely that the Taliban will succeed in regaining the control over Afghanistan it enjoyed in the 1990s. But it will be considered the main source of insurgency in Afghanistan, leading to an undermining of the central government's legitimacy in Afghan society.

Withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan will instill greater confidence in terrorist groups and their criminal activity will most likely increase. But the U.N. and ISAF, as well as other regional actors, such as Iran, Russia, and China, will continue to be interested in helping Karzai and the next government in Afghanistan to oppose the Taliban and fundamentalism. The inability to remove the Taliban has led to increasingly destructive actions against urban people who oppose the Taliban's ideas and live in big cities in Afghanistan. The marginal impact is decreasing the central government's legitimacy in cities, while in rural areas the Taliban traditionally has a powerful influence.

The hopes of the U.S. and other coalition members to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table were to no avail, since the Taliban's Idea is the flesh and blood of the fundamentalist mindset. However, the Taliban is not a terrorist group; it is a movement that opposes modernization. The differences between Islamic fundamentalism and Western civilization are deep, making it impossible for the two to coexist peacefully. Therefore, the United States is left with two alternatives. The first is to impose sanctions on the Taliban in order to isolate it and the second is to remove the Taliban, a solution that has already failed. The Taliban can only be removed after Islamic extremism in the region is removed, but this is impossible.

¹³ See: A. Acharya, S.A.A. Shah Bukhari, S. Sulaiman, "Making Money in the Mayhem: Funding Taliban, Insurrection in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, No. 32, 2009, pp. 96-97.

¹⁴ See: F. Kuntzsch, *Afghanistan's Rocky Road to Modernity: Non-State Actors and Socio-Political Entities in the Process of State- and Nation-Building*, Programme Paix et sécurité internationales, Institut québécois des hautes études internationales (HEI), July 2008, p. 13, available at [http://www.psi.ulaval.ca/fileadmin/psi/documents/Documents/Travaux_et_recherches/Afghanistan_s_Rocky_Road_to_Modernity.pdf].

The Afghan National Army and Withdrawal of the U.S. Troops from Afghanistan

Afghanistan has a new and young national army (ANA) that is faced with many problems. Some proposals suggested increasing the size of the forces to between 195,000 and 208,000 by October 2012.¹⁵ The Afghan army was expected to grow by more than 2,800 soldiers a month to meet its October 2011 target of 171,600. The overall figure is expected to keep on increasing before the Afghan forces assume combat responsibility in 2014.¹⁶

Financial resources are the most important element for reaching these goals. In the U.S., the Congress has budgeted \$12.8bn to support the Afghan national security forces in 2012, but U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates has said that this level cannot be sustained for many years.¹⁷ The Afghan economy is unable to allocate this amount of money to the army and security forces, therefore, without international aid, security in Afghanistan will probably collapse.

In his research concerning the security situation in Afghanistan, General Barry R. McCaffrey reported to the faculty at the United States Military Academy in May 2006. In his report he suggested that:

“The Afghan Army is miserably under-resourced. This is now a major morale factor for their soldiers. Afghan field commanders told me that they try to seize weapons from the Taliban who they believe are much better armed. These ANA units do not have mortars, machine guns, MK19, Kevlar helmets. They have almost no helicopters or fixed wing transport or attack aviation now or planned. They have no armor or blast glasses. This situation cries out for remedy. A well-equipped, disciplined, multi-ethnic, literate, and trained Afghan National Army is our ticket to be fully out of the country in the year 2020.”¹⁸

The Afghan National Army is faced with some problems that must be solved in Afghanistan without the U.S. troops. The first is that immediately after the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan, this country will become a battle ground for the armies of the warlords. The warlords do not accept instructions or commands from the ANA and do not help the state to maintain stability in the country. Both of them, the state army and the private rogue armies, have been involved in violence in the recent past.¹⁹

The next problem is the economic difficulties faced by the soldiers of the national army and the national police. Salaries are currently on a par with the Afghan security forces, starting with a basic wage of about \$165 (£102) per month, which rises to roughly \$250 to \$280 per month when longevity bonuses are taken into account, or extra pay for specialization or serving in the highest risk zones, such as Helmand and Kandahar. However, that salary is still less than what a young recruit could earn by joining a private militia or security company. It is also less than the money

¹⁵ See: C.J. Radin, “Afghan National Army Update,” May 2011, *The Long War Journal*, 9 May, 2011, available at [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/05/afghan_national_army_4.php].

¹⁶ See: C. Wyatt, “Can Afghan National Army Survive NATO Exit? BBC Website, 9 March, 2011, available at [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12681599>].

¹⁷ See: Ibidem.

¹⁸ B.R. McCaffrey, “Academic Report, Trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan,” 3 June, 2006, available at [http://www.washingtonspeakers.com/prod_images/pdf/McCaffreyBarry.VisitToAfghanistan.pdf].

¹⁹ See: M.Kh. Jalalzai, “The Unwanted U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan,” 16 June, 2011, available at [http://outlookafghanistan.net/topics.php?post_id=916].

offered by insurgents, who pay \$10 (about £6) a day—assuming a recruit works every day.²⁰ The weak economic situation increases the potential for corruption and can be abused by terrorist groups.

The next problem is the lack of commitment in the Afghan army rooted in the weak economy, cultural problems, delegitimization of the government, and so on. A recent report by the U.S. Inspector General for Afghanistan is even more alarming. According to his report, one quarter of the ANA recruits are absent from duty at any given time. They do not want to inform their seniors. This high rate of desertion will be one of the biggest challenges the ANA will face after the U.S. and NATO withdraw from the country.²¹ The next problem is the unequal distribution of forces. Most of the forces are stationed around Kabul and are responsible for defending security forces.

The U.S.'s Duties Concerning the Afghan Government

Concerned with the growing threat from terrorist groups, the Afghan government joined the Declaration on Strategic Partnership with the U.S., which Presidents Bush and Karzai signed in Washington on 23 May, 2005. This partnership will serve as the basis of the common efforts to cooperate in the war against international terror and the struggle against violent extremism, promote stability and prosperity in the region, and remain steadfast in supporting Afghanistan's campaign to eradicate poppy cultivation, provide alternative livelihood assistance, and fight the production and trafficking of drugs. The partnership will be anchored in the constitutions of the two countries, and will be guided by the United States and Afghanistan's respective obligations under the United Nations Charter and other international agreements and conventions.²² In this framework, the main tasks of the United States with regard to Afghanistan in the security sphere are:

- To help organize, train, equip, and sustain Afghan security forces as Afghanistan develops the capacity to undertake this responsibility.
- To consult with respect to taking appropriate measures in the event that Afghanistan perceives that its territorial integrity, independence, or security is threatened or at risk.
- To assist the Afghan government in security sector reform.
- To continue to conduct counter-terrorism operations in cooperation with Afghan forces.
- To support Coalition assistance to the Afghan Government's counter-narcotics programs.
- To continue intelligence sharing.
- To strengthen Afghanistan's ties with NATO.
- To support border security initiatives.²³

Mike Mullen, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at his meeting with President Karzai at the presidential palace in Kabul that the U.S. has a long-term commitment to Afghanistan

²⁰ See: C. Wyatt, *op. cit.*

²¹ See: M.Kh. Jalalzai, *op. cit.*

²² See: *Joint Declaration of the United States-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership*, United States White House Press Office, 23 May, 2005, available at [<http://www.afghan-web.com/politics/us-afghan-partnership.html>].

²³ See: *Ibidem.*

and is trying to support Afghanistan in the transition process, reconciliation, equipping, and reinforcing of the Afghan national security forces.²⁴

The United States should be engaged in long-term cooperation with Afghanistan for transferring security responsibility to the Afghan forces, especially with respect to equipping and reinforcing the Afghan national police and helping this country to solve problems such as corruption. Today, there is a deep sense of frustration in Afghanistan that has gradually replaced the initial enthusiasm and goodwill toward the government. Rampant corruption in the government machinery, especially in the police and judiciary, which affects the everyday life of Afghan citizens, has become a major factor in propelling the insurgency that is gaining both momentum and a degree of local support.²⁵

Conclusion

The withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan is a historical moment for the Middle East, South Asia, and Central Asia. America has decided to leave Afghanistan without reaching its set task of removing al-Qa'eda and the Taliban. Afghanistan is facing a crisis and problems such as anti-democratization of the political culture, a weak state, non-state building, and the drug mafia. But Afghanistan must not fall back into civil war after withdrawal of the American troops.

The U.S. and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan will have a considerable effect on Afghanistan national security. The continued Taliban presence in Afghanistan is a threat to the central government. The inability to achieve stabilization and peace in this country has led to a high potential for chaos and civil war. After the Taliban, the warlords are the main source of instability, and the hasty withdrawal of U.S. troops could put the central government in jeopardy. The economy and financial problems are another threat to the future of Afghanistan. Corruption is the main source of delegitimization of the central government and prevents the provision of essential welfare services. They are the most dangerous political and security elements that Afghan society will face without the direct assistance of the American troops.

After withdrawal of the American forces, Afghanistan will create both challenges and opportunities in the South Asia and the Middle East region, but this will depend on America's crisis management in the region. There are two necessary ingredients for stability in Afghanistan—international aid and development. Increasing economic growth that would shape a tax system can protect security forces. The funds spent on security will depend on how much criminal activity there is. An increase in terrorist groups and supplying the drug mafia with weapons may threaten the existence of the central government.

²⁴ See: M. Mullen, "USA has Long Term Commitment to Afghanistan," 23 April, 2011, available at [http://www.gmic.gov.af/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=216:website-journalist&catid=38:news&Itemid=87].

²⁵ See: R. Sharm, "India & Afghanistan," IPCS, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, April 2009, p. 3, available at [<http://casi.ssc.upenn.edu/system/files/Related+Resource+-+SR69-Final.pdf>].