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Go Big or Go Deep

An Analysis of Strategy Options on
Afghanistan

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Introduction

As this report is being written, there rages in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building in Washington and in various Army headquarters around the world an intense debate over what course the United States should pursue in regards to Afghanistan. The consequences of this debate will have ramifications for our country lasting decades; the cost of failing in Afghanistan is unknown but could be severe.

The debate has generally coalesced around two camps, one advocating a “Go Big” strategy involving an aggressive and fully resourced counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign and the other primary recommends a counterterrorist (CT) focus with a lighter footprint. Both have ardent and passionate defenders who claim that failing to follow their prescription will result in strategic catastrophe; neither argument is so obviously right that the President has an easy choice. This report proposes something of a hybrid alternative called “Go Deep” which eschews the so-called “minimalist” option as being too light to accomplish the President’s stated national security objectives and rejects the “maximalist” approach as being so big and intrusive that it would actually work against our intent.

These recommendations are based on my personal experience and observations in Afghanistan, on my own combat experience over a 20 year Army career, interviews with numerous people who have lived in or fought in Afghanistan, and significant research into the history of Afghanistan as well as a study of contemporary events.

This report does not claim that to follow the Go Big plan would unquestionably result in disaster because history is full of situations where superior leadership and execution rescued even flawed policy. Neither does it claim that if the President were to adopt this course of action we would definitely prevail; history is also replete with examples of otherwise solid plans failing. But it does claim that, for reasons provided throughout, Go Deep offers the best chance of success between the options currently being considered.

Many believe that assuring Go Big success is primarily a matter of deciding whether we are willing to spend the billions of dollars, suffer the casualties necessary, and invest the years most concede it will take. I contend that the culture, geography and history of Afghanistan, along with an examination of the nature of our enemy, argues persuasively against the certainty of an ultimate Go Big success, and following such a strategy may in fact actually reduce our chances.

We must also resist the temptation to go too small, as this could likewise result in an avoidable failure. Rather, it is crucial to analyze the history, geography, and people of Afghanistan, examine what has worked and what has failed in the past (paying particular attention to multiple repeating, failed patterns), and in particular study the motivations, characteristics, and tactics/strategy of our enemies in order to identify a course of action that has the best chance to safeguard America’s vital national interests.

Inherent in this process must be a willingness on the part of our leaders and idea-makers to approach this strategic problem without a requirement that a solution must be made to fit into pre-existing American molds. While there are many good things to be found in the Army’s

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newest *Counterinsurgency* Manual (FM 3-24), we must avoid the belief that all counterinsurgency strategies *must* be crafted by the formulae found therein. Perhaps even more critically, we must avoid the unquestioned belief that because a particular strategy worked in Iraq, it is certain to work in Afghanistan (covered in detail in the epilogue).

America's leaders must be focused on practically identifying the path most likely to succeed after conducting thorough analysis of all the key factors involved, and be willing to craft policy that operationalizes the results. It is, of course, a requirement that we understand those concepts that may have universal application and operate within a loose framework that recognizes our own unique history, culture, and capability to wage war. But what ought to be a non-negotiable requirement is that we must concede that we will not always be able to achieve a certain outcome simply because we desire it to be so.

The recommendations that follow may not be what many policy-makers would ideally prefer, but it is my view that with proper leadership and resources, this plan has the best chance of success of anything currently being considered. The ultimate objective must remain rigidly focused on the attainment of the President's strategic objectives:

"We have a clear and focused goal: to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future."

-- President Barack Obama,
March 27th, 2009, Washington, DC

Executive Summary

The main points of this report:

- “Go Deep” is a comprehensive and pervasive strategy that incorporates critical components of the intelligence community, special operations forces, conventional military forces, military Advise and Assist units, governmental assistance and development, provides economic advisors, features educational development, and other elements of national power to form a unified, two-track objective: to 1) conduct an aggressive counterterrorist effort associated with 2) robust, focused support to indigenous governmental and military forces. Far from representing a “retreat” from Afghanistan, it “goes deep” into numerous elements of the country and region.
- In its most basic form, Go Deep seeks to build and strengthen the Afghan government, help develop its economy, place an increased emphasis on drastically increasing literacy rates through targeted education programs, and invest in the development of its armed forces while simultaneously conducting an aggressive regional counterterrorist campaign. This plan completely agrees with the view that we cannot abandon Afghanistan. Where it differs with many well known opinion-makers, however, is in which levers of national power give us the best chance of achieving national policy objectives.
- The “Go Big” strategy carries significant risk, little of which has been publicly considered or debated. Due to the fact that logistical constraints caused by the enormous, simultaneous redeployment from Iraq would delay the introduction of meaningful numbers of combat forces in Afghanistan, the insurgent forces will have a strategic window of opportunity to continue making gains. If we are unable to convince the people of Afghanistan to support our efforts, it won’t matter how many combat troops we introduce – just as it didn’t matter how many troops Britain had 150 years ago or the Soviets did in the 1980s.
- In 2009 Afghanistan today, conditions on the ground are nothing like that of Iraq of early 2007 and there is little reason to believe the tactical success achieved by the Iraq surge could be repeated today in Afghanistan. There is presently no successful “Sons of Iraq”-type operation that would remove large numbers of enemy fighters from the streets, valleys and mountains. No large segment of the insurgency has indicated any interest in establishing a ceasefire with allied forces. The insurgency in Afghanistan today is spread over hundreds of thousands of square miles of inhospitable terrain and even 40,000 additional fighters would likely be insufficient to militarily stem the tide.


“Go Big” Analyzed

The recently leaked assessment written by the commander of NATO’s International Stabilization and Assistance Force (ISAF) General Stanley A. McChrystal is a very well written and reasoned document. On several levels it presents sound logic and advice. But the questions it does *not* address are as important – and in some cases more so – than those it does.

“Foreign Invaders”

The potential for the population to view the introduction of tens of thousands of additional troops as foreign “invaders” or “occupation forces” has received far too little consideration particularly given that US troops have already been there for eight long years and will remain for many years to come. The McChrystal report does at least mention the historic propensity for the Afghan people to view foreign troops as foreign invaders. He correctly writes:

An isolating geography and a natural aversion to foreign intervention further works against ISAF. Historical grievances reinforce connections to the tribal or ethnic identity and can diminish the appeal of a centralized state. All ethnicities, particularly the Pashtuns, have traditionally sought a degree of independence from the central government, particularly when it is not seen as acting in the best interests of the population. These and other factors result in elements of the population tolerating the insurgency and calling to push out foreigners (p.2-4).



“An isolating geography and a natural aversion to foreign intervention further works against ISAF.” – General Stanley McChrystal

Figure 1, Hindu Kush Mountains in Afghanistan

Photo: Daniel L. Davis

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But then inexplicably the report does not address how this danger will be mitigated once tens of thousands of additional troops are deployed. McChrystal's report expressly states that, "To gain accurate information and intelligence about the local environment, ISAF must spend as much time as possible with the people and as little time as possible in armored vehicles..." Many experts in and from Afghanistan warn that our presence over the past eight years has already hardened a meaningful percentage of the population into viewing the United States as an army of occupation which should be opposed and resisted. Further, there is much evidence to suggest that a portion of the opposition we face is based simply on our presence. The introduction of upwards of 40,000 additional troops is almost certain to further exacerbate this problem. Ironically, however, there is another question that must be answered in regards to the troop increase: questions of second and third order effect problems aside, are that many troops even enough to accomplish the stated operational task?

Is 40,000 Enough?

To most, 40,000 additional troops seem like a large number, particularly when compared to the 20,000 of the Iraq surge, but according to high ranking officers who have previously commanded combat troops in Afghanistan, *40,000 is not enough*. Marine Colonel Dale Alford said at a September counterinsurgency conference in Washington that it would require somewhere on the order of 10 brigades just to train the Afghan National Police (ANP) and another eight to work with the Afghan National Army (ANA) – on top of what we have today. Those 18 fighting brigades, totaling between 60,000 and 80,000, would also need an appropriate number of support units, probably in the neighborhood of 15-20,000. These 100,000 additional troops, he said, represent the *minimum* number of troops necessary to effectively conduct the COIN mission in Afghanistan.

If this highly regarded Colonel is right, the significance of his view cannot be overstated: if we attempt to execute a full-blown counterinsurgency fight, but deploy less than half the required number of troops, we may prove incapable of accomplishing the tactical mission necessary to accomplish the President's strategic objective. During my time in Afghanistan I did not take part in combat operations but did travel through many parts of the country. I can tell you from what I did see, combined with the direct combat experience I have had in the past, that COL Alford's assessment is dead on the mark. Recent combat action in Afghanistan only serves to reinforce this truth.

The battle last year at Wanat, which resulted in 36 US casualties (nine killed), and was repeated only days ago (3 October 2009) in a village called Kamdesh when eight Americans were killed, involved insurgent forces attacking Americans on a fixed base. In both cases the number of US troops was far too few to control the area of responsibility. Each base was situated in an isolated location distant from reinforcements.

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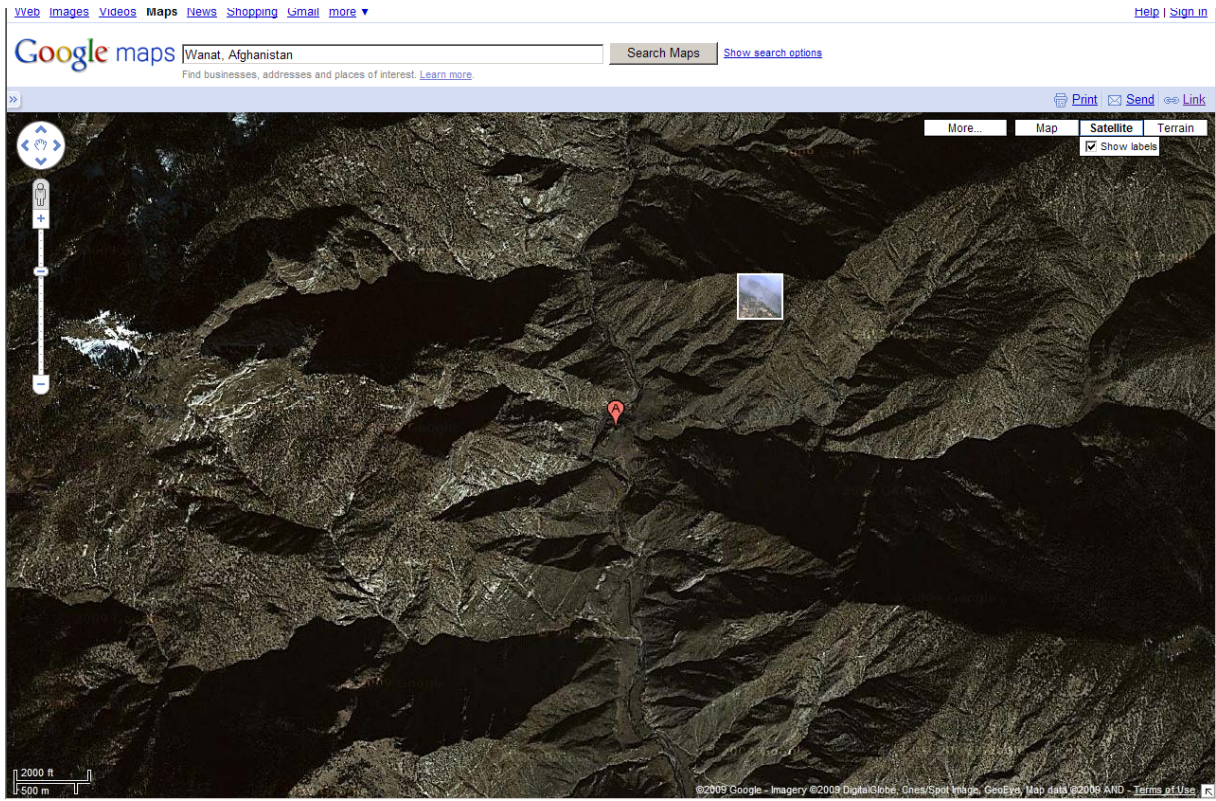


Figure 2. Wanat, Afghanistan.

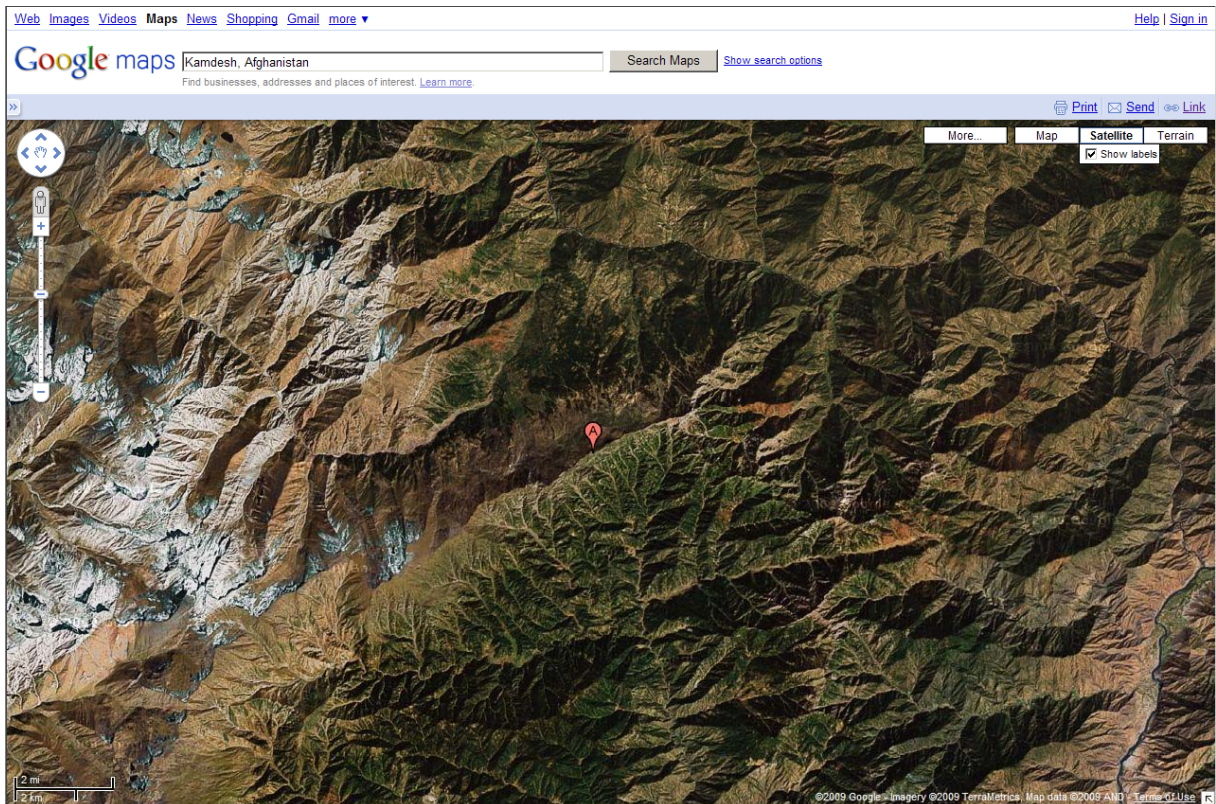


Figure 3. Kamdesh, Afghanistan

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In order to have adequately controlled either area the Army would have needed hundreds more troops – troops senior commanders simply didn't (and still don't) have. But this is the key point here: the location where the battles of both Wanat and Kamdesh took place are two tiny islands in the vast sea of the rugged mountains of Nuristan Province, as graphically seen in *Figures 2 and 3* above: if it would have taken hundreds more troops to properly garrison these two isolated locations, how many more would it take to provide even minimal coverage for all the other important locations scattered throughout Afghanistan? Viewed in context, even the 100,000 troops COL Alford recommended might be too few; 40,000 certainly wouldn't be enough.

Trust and Hope

A current US Government official who was born and raised in Afghanistan and has personal access to cabinet-level ministers of the Afghan government – but requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly on this subject – suggested that the number one problem facing the United States' efforts in Afghanistan is the absence of hope among the people. On the surface this may sound like a minimal problem, but as this official explained (whom I'll refer throughout this paper as "Mr. Rahimi"), "One of the most serious problems affecting the people of Afghanistan is the absence of hope. Hope in a viable Afghan state, hope in the prospects for a good life, hope that they can have justice." Without this hope and belief in the United States' ability to deliver results and a trust in the legitimacy of the Afghan Government, Mr. Rahimi explained, the population will never support our military efforts, and thus no counterinsurgency effort, regardless of how fully supported with troops, will succeed.

To underscore the importance of attaining the trust and rekindling the hope of the people, General McChrystal emphatically stated in his report that the people of Afghanistan:

represent many things in this conflict – an audience, an actor, and a source of leverage – but above all they are the objective... GIRoA (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan) and ISAF have both failed to focus on this objective. The weakness of state institutions, malign actions of power-brokers, widespread corruption and abuse of power by various officials and ISAF's own errors have given Afghans little reason to support their government. These problems have alienated large segments of the Afghan population. They do not trust GIRoA to provide their essential needs, such as security, justice, and basic services. This crisis of confidence, coupled with a distinct lack of economic and educational opportunity, has created fertile ground for the insurgency.

But as Mr. Rahimi explained, the declaration made by numerous high ranking American officials that the next 12 to 18 months are probably a period in which this effort will be decided may have unwittingly undercut our ability to build that trust. "It was a serious problem that General McChrystal's report was leaked and this 12 month timeframe was mentioned," Mr. Rahimi continued, "because this completely undercuts the ability of Afghanistan's citizens to foster hope. They believe right now that the West is not likely to succeed in 12 months and so will likely withdraw, leaving them in the lurch." Further exacerbating the problem – and deepening the lack of trust the people of Afghanistan have in their government – is that the dearth of hope affects government officials as well. "I have talked to cabinet ministers of Afghanistan," he began:

who hardly try to hide the fact that they are corrupt and try to get all the wealth they can for themselves and their families because they don't believe the US is going to see this through; they believe that they've got to

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get what they can now so that when things fall apart, they've got a 'parachute' to survive. Until we eliminate this pervasive attitude - and it is present at the highest levels of government all the way down to village residents - we cannot succeed in Afghanistan.

One of the first hard questions American decision-makers must answer, then, is what happens if we indeed deploy these 40,000 additional troops but are not able to gain the trust and hope of the people? By declaring this 12 to 18 month time frame, we have not only set expectations and caused trepidation among the people of Afghanistan, but perhaps more importantly have started a clock ticking in the minds of populations in key Western countries as well: if ISAF is unable to produce meaningful results in that time period – meaning generally by the end of 2010 – there will be increasingly intense pressure placed on the United States, Great Brittan, Germany, Italy and other Western capitols to cut the best deal possible and end the mission.

Unintended Consequences: Redeployment from Iraq & the Logistics Logjam

The danger of that possibility is made all the more stark when one considers the physical requirements of getting that many troops trained, deployed, and in the field conducting operations. If President Obama gave the order to deploy the troops by 1 November, it would likely be mid to late Spring before the first of those currently un-programmed units arrived in theater, and almost certainly about a year from now before all of them were on the ground. It is an enormous undertaking to alert, train, prepare, and then deploy that many troops on short notice. But our ability to even get them to Afghanistan would be greatly constrained because of another major operation that is already scheduled to take place at just the same time: the redeployment of upwards of 80,000 troops from Iraq.

What few have considered is that no major redeployments of US troops from Iraq are currently contemplated to begin until after the January 2010 provincial elections in that country. The President has already declared that all combat troops will be withdrawn from Iraq no later than August 2010. That means that between January and August 2010, the US will have to redeploy approximately 80,000 troops and their associated equipment – *at precisely the same time they would have to deploy 40,000 to Afghanistan.*

To suggest that such a requirement would strain the logistical system of the United States Military would be a gross understatement. Almost certainly we would be forced to either delay the redeployment of our forces out of Iraq or delay the introduction of forces into Afghanistan. Either of those possibilities opens our country to political and diplomatic – not to mention security – problems. But of primary concern in this report is the impact this logistical problem would portend for a “Go Big” strategy in Afghanistan. The October 12th edition of the Army Times put the nature of the problem into stark relief:

A sustainable increase in Army forces in Afghanistan hinges on the drawdown in Iraq, a senior Army planner told the Army Times. The active Army now has 11 BCTs (brigade combat team) in Iraq and five in Afghanistan, and soldiers are getting, on average, a little more than 12 months at home between deployments... “We’ve increased forces in Afghanistan before we’ve reduced forces in Iraq in a meaningful way,” the planner said. “If they want forces sooner than 2010, there are no additional forces available. You’ll have to pull them from Iraq and put them in Afghanistan. I would not support making forces turn any faster than they are now.” The demand for ‘enablers’ is greater now than it was at the height of the surge in Iraq almost two years ago, he said.”

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Even if we were able to get all the new units on the ground by October/November of next year, it takes time for them to get acclimated to conditions and adequately established on the ground to begin conducting effective counterinsurgency operations. Troops have to become acclimated to the altitude, they have to conduct thorough reconnaissance of the area of operations, and they have to develop an understanding of and a relationship with the local populations. All this takes time. Further, in the best of circumstances it would take four to six months for a US military unit to begin rolling back insurgent gains; longer if circumstances aren't favorable. That would bring us to January or February of 2011 before it would be reasonable to expect our Armed Forces to *begin* showing success. And yet that will be four to six months *after* the just announced 12 month period has expired.

Enemy Actions and Strategy

All during the time between this hypothetical November 2009 public decision by the President to commit the troops and the completion of their deployment and preparation for combat, the insurgent enemies are certain to increase the pace of their operations with a sense of great urgency. They will be armed with the knowledge that Western publics have historically grown weary of inconclusive wars. Further, al-Qaeda and associated movements (AQAM) will almost certainly seek to conduct new, spectacular terrorist attacks against the nations they perceive are the most vulnerable to pressure from war weary publics.

Right now, according to numerous polls – all of which are read with great interest by terrorists who seek to harm Western interests – there are rising anti-war/anti-Afghanistan sentiments in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and Italy. If terrorist organizations know that there is a 12 to 18 month clock ticking for Western publics, the risk that they will seek to attack the interests of some or all of those countries increases. One has to look no further than the Spanish example of 2004 to see what would motivate terrorists to make such an attempt.

Trust and Hope II

If the people of Afghanistan have no faith in their government today and no trust in the strength of Western military might (from their perspective, the most powerful military alliance on earth has proved incapable of defeating the Taliban after eight years of fighting), how will that faith and trust be prevented from further deterioration over the next 12 months, which will primarily be spent deploying and preparing for combat? Mr. Rahimi told me it is very unlikely the people will trust the US until or unless they see tangible success – something that would take considerably longer than 12 months.

“A ‘surge’ of forces designed to stay a couple of years won’t work in Afghanistan as it did in Iraq,” he said. “The people must know that we are committed to the significant amount of time necessary to turn things around, or they won’t work with us and we won’t succeed.” Most experts agree that a majority of insurgent forces are Afghan citizens. If those citizens do not come to believe that we will win, and thus “come to our side,” the insurgency will only grow in strength and effectiveness during this time of vulnerability. Acknowledging such a danger, General McChrystal wrote, “A failure to reverse the momentum of the insurgency will not only

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preclude success in Afghanistan, it will result in a loss of public and political support outside Afghanistan.”

The “Go Big” strategy carries significant risk, little of which has been publicly considered or debated. Due to the fact that logistical constraints caused by the enormous, simultaneous redeployment from Iraq would delay the introduction of meaningful numbers of combat forces in Afghanistan, the insurgent forces will have a strategic window of opportunity to continue making gains. If we are unable to convince the people of Afghanistan to support our efforts, it won’t matter how many combat troops we introduce – just as it didn’t matter how many troops Britain had 150 years ago or the Soviets did in the 1980s. It would indeed be a tragedy of historic proportions if the United States expended the enormous resources in time, money, and human life currently being contemplated, but proved unable to succeed and were later forced to withdraw in a Saigon-esque humiliating retreat.

Unfortunately, there is another major pillar necessary Go Big success that is unstable: the Government of Afghanistan.

Governmental Corruption

Much has been written about the 20 August Presidential Elections and the presence of widespread irregularities and ballot-box stuffing. As of this writing, the UN-backed Election Complaints Commission has yet to complete its investigation into the election and final results have yet to be certified. Much has been written about this issue and I will here only briefly address it. Rather, this paper will discuss what may be the greater, albeit less visible, concerns regarding Kabul’s ability to govern long term and its effect on the US strategy there.

In order to defeat the insurgency, the government of Afghanistan must become a credible, viable institution that is viewed as legitimate by its people. General McChrystal underscored the importance of that objective when he wrote: “Widespread corruption and abuse of power exacerbate the popular crisis of confidence in the government and reinforces a culture of impunity... The resulting public anger and alienation undermine ISAF’s ability to accomplish its mission.”

The last time there was effective governance in Afghanistan was the rule of King Zahir Shah who ruled from 1933 until deposed in a coup in 1973. During that 40 years the country was loosely ruled from Kabul, but the issues of day-to-day governance were primarily handled by the local tribes and regions. But given the geographical realities of the country and the near absence of a modern communications or transportation system, this arrangement worked very well. According to one Afghan citizen I spoke to who lived there during the reign of Zahir Shah, there was a strong sense of peace and security. “We didn’t even have to worry about locking our doors at night,” he told me. But after the King was deposed in the near-bloodless coup in 1973 that brought Daoud Khan to power things began to change.

The Afghan Communists that had helped Daoud come to power themselves overthrew the government in a very bloody coup in 1978. Less than two years later, however, the Communists were unable to placate their masters in Moscow and Soviet troops invaded on Christmas Day

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1979. From that moment continuing through today, Afghanistan has been at war of one type or another and the people have become jaded at the parade of ineffectual governments that have been put in office by one power or another. Under the circumstances, it isn't hard to understand why the current government enjoys such little support from its people. Without the active support of the people to oppose the Taliban and other insurgent groups, there is nothing the United States or any other external force can do to beat the insurgency.

One of the most crucial questions, then, is how do we eliminate this governmental corruption so that it can effectively govern, provide basic services for its people, and successfully defend them against insurgent violence. The answer: focused efforts, significant resources, and most critically, the passage of time – enough of which we may not have.

It is not enough to simply say the rulers are corrupt and “ought” not be that way. Due to the tribal nature of how Afghanistan has historically been governed, cutting deals, making temporary alliances, and sometimes the use of violence have been the norm. In order to bring about a change there's got to be the creation of an entirely new cohort of leaders and rulers in Afghanistan.

The men who rule today have in most cases risen to power either through the application of violence or the application of money. For this dynamic to change, there must be an aggressive education effort (more on this later in the paper). But right now there are virtually no potential leaders in the education pipeline with which we could have near-term hope for meaningful change in how Afghanistan is governed.

It is hard to believe, but an astounding 72% of the adult population is illiterate, only 16% of high school-eligible children are in school, and less than two percent of college eligible students are in class. Until this deplorable state of affairs is addressed there is little hope that in the near future Afghanistan is going to be able to provide itself with adequately qualified men and women with which to govern. Regrettably, this dearth of educated elite also hamstringing Afghanistan in another important category: military leadership.

Growing the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF): Who Will Lead – Who Will Pay?

Another of the major fundamentals upon which our eventual redeployment from Afghanistan is contingent, is the training, mentoring, and now growing, of the ANSF. In his report, McChrystal said the Afghan National Army (ANA) is scheduled to grow to 134,000 by the Fall of 2010 but recommended “a new target ceiling of 240,000” and that the Afghan National Police (ANP) “must be raised to 160,000” for a total force of 400,000. There are two significant problems with this proposal that must be addressed.

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Figure 4, New Afghan Recruit

Photo: Daniel L. Davis

Raising an army and police to those numbers (400,000) requires not simply a bunch of men wearing uniforms, but capable leaders at multiple echelons.

First, as noted above, the country is massively illiterate and presently no major effort has been started to redress that deficiency. Raising an army and police to those numbers requires not simply a bunch of men wearing uniforms, but capable leaders at multiple echelons. Even in the United States it takes more than 15 years to “grow” a battalion commander. It might be possible to field 400,000 men to fill the uniforms and physically create the huge number of companies, battalions, and brigades necessary to organize that many men. But without properly trained officers and non-commissioned officers to lead those men they will not be effective in combat. As a means of comparison, let us consider what happened when a similar effort was undertaken in Iraq.

Presently there are some 600,000 members of the various Iraqi Security Forces. We started building the Iraqi Army in 2004. Most remember the disastrous performance of the Iraqi Army in tough fights against the insurgency in Baghdad in 2005. Today, five years after the first units were formed, the Iraqi Army is finally able to minimally handle their internal security. But it is important to note that prior to our 2003 invasion, Iraq had an existing Army well over 500,000 strong for many years prior. Though we disbanded it in 2003, when it came time to rebuild it the next year, a significant number of the mid and senior level leaders already had years of experience in those roles. By contrast, we’re creating an Afghan Army where virtually none existed prior to our 2001 attack.

To now try and accelerate the creation of the ANSF by hundreds of thousands in order to help us with the fight is risky business. In order to undertake this mission we must do so with the tacit understanding that we will be signing up for well over a decade of mentoring, training and advising the ANSF; anything short of that will create the potential for disaster. A large number of ill-trained and poorly led soldiers have no chance against a much smaller, mobile, well led and highly experienced insurgent force. Consideration should be given to keeping the numbers smaller so that soldiers and leaders of the ANSF have the chance to gain the necessary level of experience and focused training from our limited number of advisors. Numbers of soldiers is only one reason to consider keeping the numbers smaller. The other: money.

By some estimates, increasing the ANSF to 400,000 would equal three to four times the country’s total GDP. Without question, then, if the President approves General McChrystal’s

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request to grow Afghan forces, someone is going to have to sign up to pay for those troops and commit to doing so for the duration they are at that level.

It would be irresponsible to increase the size of the military to that level, convincing hundreds of thousands of additional Afghan men to join, giving them field training and weapons, and then at some point suddenly cease funding, throwing tens of thousands out of work. The alternative is that some country or countries will have to commit for the foreseeable future to paying billions of dollars each year to maintain this force. What happens if, in a few years, no one wants to pay that money? What if the national economies of whatever countries agree to pay this bill come under domestic pressure to cease funding the ANSF because their own economies need the money? What will become of those 100s of thousands of military aged males who suddenly find themselves without a job in a nation that according to the CIA Factbook had an unemployment rate of 40% last year and is already the second poorest nation on earth? We've already seen what happened in Iraq when we disbanded their army in 2003: the birth of an insurgency we are still fighting six years later.

If the likelihood of fielding a poorly led, poorly manned unit is high, and the certainty that the country itself could never sustain that level of force, we must give serious consideration to choosing another way forward.

Go Deep: Setting the Conditions

Aggressive Intelligence-driven Operations

“Go Deep” is a comprehensive and pervasive strategy that incorporates critical components of the intelligence community, special operations forces, conventional military forces, military Advise and Assist units, governmental assistance and development, provides economic advisors, features educational development, and other elements of national power that are synthesized to form a unified, two-track objective: to 1) conduct an aggressive counterterrorist effort associated with 2) robust, focused support to indigenous governmental and military forces. Far from representing a “retreat” from Afghanistan, it “goes deep” into numerous elements of the region.

In its most basic form, Go Deep seeks to simultaneously build and strengthen the Afghan government, help develop its economy, place an increased emphasis on drastically increasing literacy rates through targeted education programs, and invest in the development of its armed forces while simultaneously conducting an aggressive regional counterterrorist campaign. This plan completely agrees with the majority of opinion-leaders that we cannot abandon Afghanistan. Where it differs, however, is in which levers of national power we should use to give us the best chance of achieving national policy objectives.

For reasons outlined throughout this paper, I believe that Go Big uses the wrong instruments and could unintentionally make our situation worse, while Go Deep uses a more nuanced approach – but one that is aggressive in its intent to attack and destroy America’s enemies while being equally aggressive in its support of America’s friends. To begin, I wish to examine a few of the arguments put forward by some of America’s most well respected opinion leaders on the subject.

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In a recent Washington Post opinion piece Michael O'Hanlon ridiculed a counterterrorist approach in Afghanistan as being a "truly bad idea" which has already been "tried and discredited" and that the very idea should be refuted because it does "not deserve intellectual sanctuary." It is curious that Dr. O'Hanlon, one of the more educated and highly respected writers in the country, would hold such a view on previous counterterrorist efforts, as an analysis of pre-9/11 efforts reveals that parts of our efforts were in fact remarkably successful. It was political decisions, in some key situations, that resulted in lost opportunities. As will be demonstrated, many of the previous failures of the intelligence community have already been remedied and if policy-makers enact some of the recommendations found later in this report, what was a weakness prior to September 11th will in a Go Deep world become a source of strength.

What the 9/11 Commission Report Didn't Say

One of the most common refutations today on the idea that anything short of applying massive combat power in an all-out counterinsurgency program can achieve success in Afghanistan, is the premise that a counterterrorist (CT) approach has already been unsuccessfully attempted. An editorial in the September 3rd 2009 Washington Post opined that while critics of the Go Big plan oppose "what has yet to be tried" the alternatives have been tried and resulted in failure. "As for limiting U.S. intervention in Afghanistan to attacks by drones and Special Forces units," the editors wrote, "that was the strategy of the 1990s, which, as chronicled by the Sept 11 commission, paved the way for al-Qaeda's attacks on New York and Washington." But did the 9/11 Commission really say that? An analysis of the report itself provides a rather different view.

Much has been made of the intelligence failures leading to that infamous day in 2001, but lost in the broad condemnation is that the intelligence community got some things very right, and had their advice been followed at a key moment, those tragic events might never have happened. But of greater significance to our discussion, the fundamentals of what went right during the period of time covered by the 9/11 Commission Report (hereafter referred to simply as "The 9/11 Report"), along with correcting what went wrong – provide compelling evidence that an effectively run counter terrorism program can indeed work today in Afghanistan.

"Jeff" and "Mike" with bin Laden in the Crosshairs

The Washington Post editorial referred to above reflects conventional understanding in today's think-tank world that the 9/11 Report describes the failure of our intelligence and counterterrorism efforts of the late 90s and "proves" that a counterterrorism effort can't work in Afghanistan today. Because the 9/11 Report did cite a number of intelligence failures, there is widespread belief that *all* intelligence operations of the time failed. That is not correct. In fact, despite the criticism leveled against the Central Intelligence Agency, there was one spectacular thing they got right. According to the report:

CIA's intelligence assets were "near to providing real-time information about Bin Ladin's activities and travels in Afghanistan."... By the fall of 1997, the Bin Ladin unit had roughed out a plan for these Afghan tribals to capture Bin Ladin and hand him over for trial either in the United States or in an Arab country. In

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early 1998, the cabinet-level Principals Committee apparently gave the concept its blessing (P.110). CIA officers were able to map the entire site, identifying the houses that belong to Bin Ladin's wives and the one where Bin Ladin himself was most likely to sleep. Working with the tribals, they drew up plans for the raid. They ran two complete rehearsals in the United States during the fall of 1997 (p.111-112)...

Nevertheless, after much debate in the Clinton Administration, a political decision was made not to go after bin Laden. Two CIA agents - "Mike" and "Jeff" (whose names were changed in the 9/11 Report to protect their true identities) - had been coordinating the effort to take bin Laden out. "On May 20

Director (of the CIA George) Tenet discussed the high risk of the operation with (National Security Advisor Sandy) Berger and his deputies, warning that people might be killed, including bin Laden. Success was to be defined as the exfiltration of Bin Laden out of Afghanistan. A meeting of principals was scheduled for May 29 to decide whether the operations should go ahead. On May 29 (1998), "Jeff" informed "Mike" that he had just met with Tenet, (James) Pavitt, and the chief of the Directorate's Near Eastern Division. The decision was made not to go ahead with the operation... He had been told, he wrote, that cabinet-level officials thought the risk of civilian casualties - "collateral damage" - was too high. They were concerned about the tribals' safety, and had worried that "the purpose and nature of the operation would be subjected to unavoidable misinterpretation and misrepresentation - and probably recriminations - in the event that Bin Ladin, despite our best intentions and efforts, did not survive (p.114)."

According to the 9/11 Report, it is uncertain who actually made the decision not to pull the trigger. Most evidence seems to suggest it was one of several high ranking officials in the Administration. Berger said the plan was never submitted to the White House for a decision. It is significant, however, that the intelligence apparatus was successful in its identification of the greatest terrorist threat to the United States and had developed and rehearsed a plan to take him out. Only a political decision prevented it from killing or capturing bin Laden three years prior to September 11th.

Multiple Agencies, No Crosstalk

One of the other problems identified by the 9/11 Report was the lack of coordination between critical agencies. But the Report notes that individual agencies, nevertheless, did a commendable job. The report states:

In sum, in late 1997 and the spring of 1998, the lead U.S. agencies each pursued their own efforts against Bin Ladin. The CIA's counterterrorist Center was developing a plan to capture and remove (Bin Ladin) from Afghanistan. Parts of the Justice Department were moving toward indicting Bin Ladin, making possible a criminal trail in New York court. Meanwhile, the State Department was focused more on lessening Indo-Pakistani nuclear tensions, ending the Afghan civil war, and ameliorating the Taliban's human rights abuses... (p.111)

Had the US Government at the time been properly focused these agencies would have worked together, compared notes, and likely would have provided the President a more comprehensive picture of the emerging danger to the United States than they did. Today that problem has been significantly reduced. Not only have we added an entire new department since then - Homeland Security - but we have taken action to coordinate the efforts and knowledge of all relevant departments and agencies through the auspices of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI).

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According to their web site, the mission of the ODNI is to “Integrate foreign, military, and domestic intelligence capabilities through policy, personnel and technology actions to provide decision advantage to policy makers, warfighters, homeland security officials and law enforcement personnel.” While the coordination issue between intelligence agencies has been largely resolved, the Report identified other impediments to effective action: politics.

Political Circumstances and Conditions

It would be easy to point a finger of blame at the Clinton Administration for failing to take Bin Laden out when they had the chance in 1998, but that is only easy with 20/20 hindsight. At the time of the events, conditions surrounding these decisions were convoluted and difficult, to say the least. Appreciation of those attendant conditions is important to understanding why the Clinton Administration didn't make the decision to kill or capture bin Laden in 1998 – but more importantly for this discussion – it is also key to understanding why those same decisions wouldn't be made in a future counterterrorism effort.

When “Jeff” and “Mike” recommended the strike against Bin Laden, the Clinton Administration had other significant international issues with which to contend: “After years of war in the Balkans, the United States had finally committed itself to significant military intervention in 1995-1996... Air strikes were threatened (against Serbia) in October 1998; a full-scale NATO bombing campaign against Serbia was launched in March 1999 (p.119).” In addition, the Clinton administration was facing the possibility of major combat operations against Iraq (P.118-119).”

Even after Bin Laden had attacked the two American Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam and the President had launched cruise missile strikes against him and his al Qaeda network, his Administration was attacked by many pundits who claimed his, “action was too aggressive” and would only further inflame Muslim anger towards the United States. Today, significantly fewer restraints exist. In the event that the US intelligence community gained information of an impending attack or located a known terrorist, corroborated through the DNI, the President would hesitation in ordering a strike.

As the 9/11 Report pointed out, the intelligence community – even in the pre-9/11 world – was fairly effective in identifying and tracking the world's most dangerous terrorist. But due to competing international issues, lack of crosstalk, and a failure to appreciate the true danger posed by terrorist attacks, the US Government at the time did not take decisive action. Those problems and shortfalls have been reduced or eradicated in the post-9/11 world. The focus our nation has today, combined with the creation of the Homeland Security Department and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the cooperation of the Department of Defense makes a robust and effective counterterrorism effort a distinct possibility. But how should this effort be undertaken? Here is one idea.

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What We Should (and are already organized to) Do: Going Deep

It isn't enough to point out problems and throw rocks. I do not wish simply to say that "Go Big" would lead to a failure in Afghanistan for which we could perversely pay an increasing amount of blood and treasure for decreasing benefit. Rather, I seek to offer viable alternatives that are grounded on careful analysis, detailed study, and personal observation. I contend that evidence and historical precedent suggests that the following plan, would have a better chance of accomplishing American objectives than Go Big. Below I will lay out the general fundamentals of Go Deep, followed by a description of the risk involved for both options.

It is important to note that every option contains the potential for negative and unintended consequences. Though I wholeheartedly support Go Deep as the better alternative, I do not wish to convey that it will answer all the challenges without risk. It will not. There will still be no guarantees. What I do represent, however, is that when compared to the risk of the Go Big option, the risks of Go Deep are more manageable and portend a greater chance of success. One of benefits to the following recommendations is that most of the component parts already exist in our government in one form or another. Consequently we don't have to "recreate the wheel" but make sure those existing capabilities and organizations are coordinated and synchronized to maximum benefit.

Jack Bauer

In August 2004, resulting from one of the key recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Report, the United States created an organization called the National Counterterrorist Center (NCTC). Answering to the President and the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), the NCTC was designed to correct some of the deficiencies previously cited of poor coordination between pertinent departments and agencies within the US Government. According to the organization's web site, part of their core mission is to conduct "strategic operational planning for CT activities across the USG, integrating all instruments of national power, including diplomatic, financial, military, intelligence, homeland security, and law enforcement to ensure unity of effort." While the mere existence of the NCTC represents an advancement from where we were on September 10, 2001, it falls short of where we need to be in today's increasingly complex CT world heading into 2010.

The reality is that the NCTC is not adequately empowered to accomplish its assigned mission. When it was first publicly recommended by the 9/11 Commission in Congressional testimony in April 2003, it was designed primarily to synthesize information between and across various departments and agencies, but not with the power to coordinate *action*. According to the hearing records, Michael Wermuth of the RAND Corporation, testifying for the Commission, said

The panel recommended the creation of something that it called the "National Counterterrorism Center" an all source intelligence fusion analysis and dissemination center that would be comprised of pieces of the various agencies directly involved. The Central Intelligence Agency, the Department of Justice, other components of the intelligence community, to bring together all of the raw intelligence data, if you will, and to try to make some sense out of that in a comprehensive fashion. To include in that process, representatives of states and localities that would also help to inform through their resources, all the way down to the local beat cop on the street, and to develop the best possible intelligence products for dissemination to people who have need to know that information (

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The genesis of this organization came in the still-smoldering aftermath of the 9/11 attacks – and critically – before terrorist organizations were present in Iraq (which did not come until early 2004 by most accounts) and during a time when Afghanistan was mostly docile. Today things are obviously very different. The NCTC must do more than simply conduct “fusion analysis,” it must also be empowered to coordinate action. It needs a Jack Bauer-like capability.

Jack Bauer’s “Counterterrorism Unit (CTU)” of the hit TV show “24” fictitiously included a robust intelligence capability but also coordinated operations to take action on that information. The NCTC should therefore be empowered to synthesize intelligence, but also to conceive, develop, and recommend action which will ultimately be approved/disapproved by one of its two bosses (the President or the DNI). The NCTC must work very closely with both the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense – and frequently with the DoD’s Special Forces – to detect, locate, track, and when a political decision is made, to destroy terrorist groups and/or individuals.

Today there is no coordinated effort to synthesize the information with the action necessary to track and neutralize both domestic and international terrorism. Within the Department of Defense alone there are various agencies and organizations with responsibility to conduct counterterrorist operations. Combatant Commands and field commands in both Iraq and Afghanistan have some responsibility – in addition to their war-fighting requirements. Also within DoD there is the Special Forces which conduct a number of different counterterrorism-related operations while the CIA and FBI conduct independent operations of their own. It isn’t enough to have a single organization – the NCTC – integrate information; there must also be a single entity also coordinate counterterrorist operations. Eight years after 9/11 and five years after the release of the 9/11 Report, we still have no unity of effort regarding action. This must change.

Going Deep in Afghanistan

Far too often the advocates of Go Big deride anything as a minimalist approach which “relies on drones and missile attacks from off shore.” In fact, Go Deep – while exploiting all the capabilities resident in both the striking and ISR (intelligence, security, and reconnaissance) features of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) – relies on a full range of capabilities resident in the United States Department of Defense and Central Command.

We will use covert agents, in conjunction and association with locals to develop (and expand) human intelligence resources that help to identify the Taliban and other insurgent leaders from the non-insurgent people – no easy task. We will indeed make extensive use of unmanned aerial vehicles for intelligence and reconnaissance as well as Predator missile attacks once the enemy is positively identified. We will continue to exploit all technical means of tracking them, to include cell phone intercepts, satellite imagery, and other tools of the intelligence world.

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Figure 5

Photo: Daniel L. Davis

Going Deep means the NCTC-led effort will coordinate with other allied nations, the ANSF, the US Army, Air Force, Marines, and Navy when appropriate to relentlessly disrupt, attack, and destroy those who seek to oppose the United States and its vital national interests. This tactic has been much more effective against Taliban and other terrorists in Pakistan than has been generally understood and there is reason to believe that as we continue to refine the process and gain experience we will be more successful in the future, particularly in Afghanistan.

Counterintuitively, our efforts are currently complicated by the number of conventional troops we have on the ground, as in many cases our mere presence fuels the insurgency by playing directly into the insurgent propaganda efforts painting the United States as a “foreign occupation.” By removing the bulk of those forces, we deny the Taliban a key Information Operations (IO) success, we deny them the moral strength of fighting the occupation – because there will no longer be one (or at least a significantly reduced one). Thus far we have given far too little consideration of how our presence fuels the insurgency. Perhaps a little look back at our own history might prove instructive.

When we launched a rebellion against the British Crown in 1775 many of our leaders and people committed themselves to winning their freedom no matter what the cost. All 56 men who signed our Declaration of Independence did so with the understanding that they would be executed if captured by the British. Still one of our favorite quotes from the Revolutionary War is Patrick Henry’s famous “give me liberty or give me death!” Neither the threat of imprisonment, the loss of property, nor the risk to life dissuaded the bulk of patriotic Americans of that era. Few Americans realize, however, that after the British withdrew our country almost disintegrated because of significant internal disputes between the various states and political organizations.

Less well known among most in America today, was the experience of the British in the First Anglo-Afghan War of 1839-42. That, frankly speaking, is ancient history to most of us and of little interest. To the average Afhan citizen, according to Mr. Rahimi, it carries the same emotional baggage as events that happened yesterday.

After the British invaded Afghanistan in 1839, they struggled for three years to bring the country under control. After attempts to reach accommodation with multiple Afghan tribes failed to

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produce fruit, London ordered its troops to withdrawal. In January 1842 upwards of 15,000 British Soldiers and their families left Kabul heading for another British garrison in Jalalabad. Afghan mujahedeen began attacking them all along the way and less than 15 people ultimately survived. According to the 1986 publication of the US Army's *Afghanistan: A Country Study*, "The destruction of the British garrison prompted brutal retaliation by the British against the Afghans and touched off yet another power struggle among potential rulers of Afghanistan." This had consequences lasting decades and helps to explain how and why it still resonates so strongly in the people of Afghanistan today.

"Although the foreign invasion did give the Afghan tribes a temporary sense of unity they had lacked before," the book continues, "the accompanying loss of life and property was followed by a bitterness and resentment of foreign influence that lasted well into the twentieth century and may have accounted for much of the backlash against the modernization attempts of later Afghan monarchs." This feeling of bitterness and resentment was deepened during the Second Anglo-Afghan War several decades later. Another noteworthy repetition of the temporary nature of the unity of the Afghan fighters was to take place almost a hundred years later.

After the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989 the years-long unity of the Mujahedeen evaporated and without their unifying hatred of the foreign invader they fought each other. We already know that the insurgency that exists today is unified in its hatred of the American "invaders" but is composed of a patch-work of groups with sometimes wildly divergent agendas. As with the British in the eighteenth century and the Soviets in the twentieth century, absent the unifying focus of attacking American ground forces there is every reason to believe that the insurgent enemy will again fragment into feuding bands, creating enormous opportunity to reach accommodation with numerous individual tribes. In that case the only unified organization existing in Afghanistan will be the GIROA and the ANSF. Thus, the charge by those who strongly support Go Big that a "retreat" will result in the Taliban marching on Kabul are exaggerated and anything but certain. I contend that with removing the bulk of our ground forces combined with an aggressive accommodation campaign could actually weaken the enemy and give us a better chance of success.

ANSF and the Redeployment of US Conventional Forces

In the 5 October edition of *Newsweek*, an article entitled "The Taliban in Their Own Words" provided a remarkable view into the thinking of the Taliban going all the way back prior to 9/11. It is clearly evident throughout the five accounts provided by authors Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau that the presence of American forces in Afghanistan played a significant role in the revival of the Taliban in the years after the October 2001 attack.

All five of the Taliban members interviewed for the article gave dark accounts of gloom and despair following our October 2001 attack. It was noteworthy how helpless they felt and how deep into depression many of the fell. "I never thought the Taliban would collapse so quickly and cruelly under U.S. bombs. Everyone began trying to save themselves and their families," said Maulvi Mohammad Haqqani. "When the bombing started, I was commanding some 400 fighters on the front lines near Mazar-e Sharif," recalled Maulvi Abdul Rehman Akhundzada. "The bombs cut down our men like a reaper harvesting wheat. Bodies were dismembered. Dazed

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fighters were bleeding from the ears and nose from the bombs' concussions. We couldn't bury the dead. Our reinforcements died in their trenches.”

But then things began turning for the Taliban in 2004 because of an unexpected boon to them from the US war in Iraq. Haqqani explains that “Arab and Iraqi mujahedin began visiting us, transferring the latest IED technology and suicide-bomber tactics they had learned in the Iraqi resistance during combat with U.S. forces. The American invasion of Iraq was very positive for us. It distracted the United States from Afghanistan. Until 2004 or so, we were using traditional means of fighting like we used against the Soviets—AK-47s and RPGs. But then our resistance became more lethal, with new weapons and techniques: bigger and better IEDs for roadside bombings, and suicide attacks.” From this point it becomes clear that the Taliban started to gain momentum and motivation on the presence of American forces in Afghanistan.

“The Afghan Taliban were weak and disorganized. But slowly the situation began to change,” remembered Mullah Aga Mohammad. “American operations that harassed villagers, bombings that killed civilians, and Karzai's corrupt police and officials were alienating villagers and turning them in our favor. Soon we didn't have to hide so much on our raids. We came openly. When they saw us, villagers started preparing green tea and food for us. The tables were turning.” Demonstrating not only their motivation, these Taliban members also exposed the matter-of-fact willingness to use horrific tactics to accomplish their goals. Said Qari Younas:

Our real jihad was beginning by the start of 2005. Jalaluddin Haqqani's tribal fighters came actively back to our side because the Americans and the Pakistanis had arrested his brother and other relatives. He appointed his son Sirajuddin to lead the resistance. That was a real turning point. Until then villagers in Paktia, Paktika, and Khost thought the Taliban was defeated and finished. They had started joining the militias formed by the Americans and local warlords, and were informing on us and working against us. But with the support of Haqqani's men we began capturing, judging, and beheading some of those Afghans who worked with the Americans and Karzai. Terrorized, their families and relatives left the villages and moved to the towns, even to Kabul. Our control was slowly being restored.

Haqqani ended his interview with *Newsweek* by explaining why he believed the Taliban would continue to succeed. His is a single voice, but evidence suggests his views are indicative of a general truth among his fellow fighters. “I admit Taliban commanders are being captured and killed, but that hasn't stopped us, and it won't,” he said. “Our jihad is more solid and deep than individual commanders and fighters—and we are not dependent on foreigners, on the ISI [Pakistan's intelligence agency], or Al Qaeda. Personally I think all this talk about Al Qaeda being strong is U.S. propaganda. As far as I know, Al Qaeda is weak, and they are few in numbers. Now that we control large amounts of territory, we should have a strict code of conduct for any foreigners working with us. We can no longer allow these camels to roam freely without bridles and control.”



Figure 6. US Helicopters at Bagram Air Base

Photo: Daniel L. Davis

“But we didn't get close enough to fire our Kalashnikovs; before we could move in, American helicopters came, raining rockets and bullets on us. Terrified, I crawled and ran to escape death. Amid the noise and explosions, dust and smoke, I remember seeing six of us cut down and killed.”

--Taliban member Qari Younas as quoted in the October 5th edition of Newsweek

Certainly the views of five Taliban fighters relating anecdotal evidence is insufficient upon which to build a military strategy, but it is significant in that it corroborates a number of other pieces of evidence which together paint a similar picture. I believe evidence suggests that had the bulk of American Forces redeployed from Afghanistan in late 2002/early 2003, the Taliban very possibly would never have returned as a coherent fighting force. The Taliban interviews include numerous accounts of fighters who initially were despondent after they were so quickly and utterly destroyed by US-led forces in 2001, with many succumbing to depression.

It was only after the passage of two or three years without a redeployment of American troops – along with the failure of US/NATO forces in providing an improved quality of life for the Afghan citizens and in the corruption of the Afghan government – that disgraced former Taliban fighters and leaders began to find reason to return to the struggle, and equally important, to find people willing to support them. As I demonstrated in an Armed Forces Journal article in April of this year, an examination of attack trends and troop levels over the next several years showed that as we sent more US fighting troops to Afghanistan, the Taliban was able to recruit more fighters and inflict more damage.

One of the biggest fears voiced by many adherents of the Go Big theory is that if the US Military withdraws, the Taliban will overcome the ANSF and take Kabul. But the Go Deep concept does not envision the complete withdrawal of American and NATO military forces. Go Deep recognizes that the training of the ANSF continues to be an important component of an eventual strategy resulting in the complete withdrawal of American military forces from Afghanistan. In the near term, however, the plan would be to set an 18 month time frame during which the bulk of American and NATO combat forces would be withdrawn from the country. Concurrent we would focus on training the ANSF to continue deepening and broadening their abilities. But I recommend that we limit the number of Afghan National Security Forces to the numbers approved by the September 10, 2008, Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB): 134,000 members of the ANA and 80,000 members of the ANP.

Even these numbers will exceed the amount of money the Afghan Government can sustain by itself over time, but it will be closer than the 400,000 combined members of the ANSF currently

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being recommended by some, which will cost up to five times the country's total GDP. However, by focusing international efforts on increasing the capability of the existing ANSF – and not in adding more than 200,000 additional forces from a resource pool of largely unqualified personnel – we will produce a more highly qualified security force that can successfully conduct internal security for its people and government.

Meanwhile, the United States and/or NATO would establish a base of Special Operation Forces which would continue working with the ANSF throughout the country to continue developing Human Intelligence sources by which kinetic operations against irreconcilable or unrepentant insurgent and/or terrorist forces would be identified, targeted, and killed or captured.

Reconciliation

One area that seems consistent among adherents both of Go Big and CT strategies is the expectation of negotiations or attempts at reconciliation with willing members of the insurgency who are willing to cease fighting and come to accommodation with the government. Go Deep wholeheartedly endorses this view. Not only is it generally a good idea, but an integral part of Afghan culture is the propensity of various groups, tribes and individuals to be pragmatic in their support of whom or what they believe will lead them to success. They are used to making deals to better themselves, and we should exploit this propensity for the good of all. Since this report agrees with the consensus of opinion on this topic, I will not here discuss it further.

The Pakistan Factor

When discussing the conduct of political and military operations in Afghanistan it is an unavoidable requirement to also consider the ramifications on neighboring Pakistan. As is well known to most of those who are reading this report, the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan exists for the most part only on a map (to get a sense of the genuine difficulty of even identifying the border, much less defending it, see below the satellite photo of the border and the view from the ground in Figures 7 and 8), and it is virtually impossible to prevent cross border foot traffic. Regardless of which course of action the President ultimately chooses, the United States will have to devise an effective policy for dealing with terrorist elements on both sides of the border, and in coordination with the governments of both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

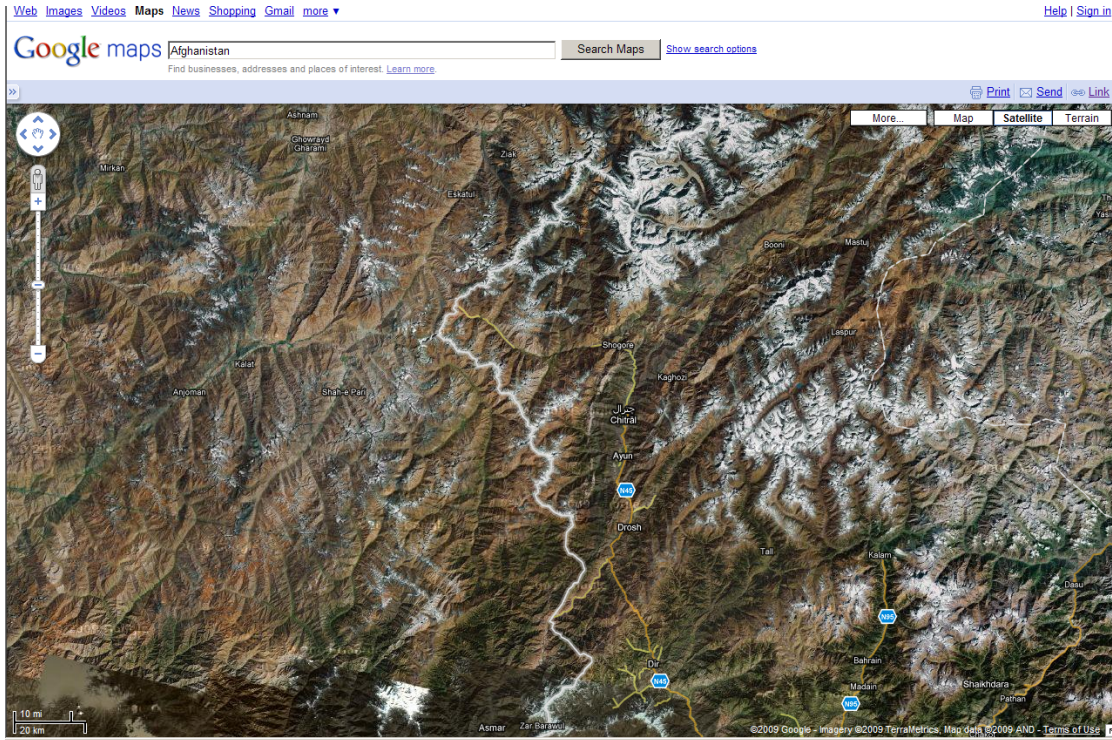


Figure 7. *Afghan/Pakistan Border*



Figure 8. *Section of the Afghan/Pakistan Border*

Boston Globe, 2002

According to numerous public reports, diplomatic and military cooperation between Washington and Islamabad have made notable advancements in the past couple of years. This type of cooperation must continue to develop under any scenario. Reports indicate that the joint US-Pakistan counterterrorist efforts in the most isolated and inhospitable parts of that country –

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where the majority of Taliban and al Qaeda fighters are currently believed to live – have begun to reap occasionally significant benefits, as one major terrorist leader after another has been killed or captured.

As described previously in this paper, while the majority of conventional US forces would be redeployed from Afghanistan, a meaningful number of Special Operations forces would remain, along with a robust UAV capability and a US Air Force presence. With the absence of American troop concentrations on the ground, the Taliban would be denied easily identifiable and lucrative targets against which to launch attacks. We must not lose sight of the fact that the insurgency typically gains nothing tactically from attacking American positions: their objective is to gain an “information operations” victory.

The attack against the US outpost at Wanat last year and at Kamdesh last week resulted in a total of 17 American Soldiers killed in action. Strictly from a tactical point of view, this number is comparatively small and gained the enemy little. But due to the enormous international media exposure to the attacks, especially in the United States, they benefited enormously. Imagine, now, if we removed those isolated troop locations, denying the Taliban the ability to conduct hit-and-run attacks in areas where it’s almost impossible to find them – and instead conduct a more aggressive Special Operations-centric campaign where we strike them using UAV and Air Force assets.

We know from numerous interviews with insurgent fighters that one of their greatest sources of discouragement is when bombs and missile suddenly rain from the sky killing them and destroying their camps. Their frustration is multiplied immeasurably when they don’t even know where the attack came from and are unable to return fire. We will continue to conduct these types of operations in cooperation with Islamabad inside Pakistani territory and expand their use throughout Afghanistan.

Beyond question Pakistan is a volatile country with many internal problems. Many reports suggest that their premier intelligence service – the ISI (Inter-Service Intelligence) – sometimes operates on its own agenda and outside the purview of government control. Further, beginning as far back as the Soviet/Afghanistan War, the ISI is reported to have actually helped support certain elements of the Afghan Taliban and might still do so. Regardless of what we want to do, however, Pakistan is a presently a sovereign state and there are limits to what we can do. Nevertheless we have a great stake in stability there and must therefore do all we can to help Islamabad maintain legitimacy and remain in control of its country. Go Deep envisions continuing, if not deepening, cooperation and assistance to Pakistan.

Economic Development

Beginning immediately and continuing beyond the redeployment of the conventional forces, other countries and international organizations would continue to work with the Afghan government to foster, facilitate, and fund projects designed to assist in the development of a sustainable economy in Afghanistan. The US State Department, United Nations, and other NGOs would coordinate efforts in this area to give the Afghan citizens a chance for success.

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Nations such as Japan have already shown an interest in increasing their involvement in economic development.

Education

As pointed out earlier in this report, until Afghanistan can develop a cohort of educated, qualified citizens, any sort of governmental reform, sustainable economic development, or scientific advancement will be impossible unless there is first educational reform. To date this has been one of the most crucial elements of rebuilding a viable Afghanistan and one of the least seriously addressed issues. This must change. Thus far improving the education has been considered and partially funded, but for success we must change the level of effort from moderate to ‘fully engaged.’ An extremely aggressive international plan must be put in place that funds and supports the type of education that the Afghan people support. It can’t be dictated from outside, it must be chosen from within.

This means that we must be willing to accept some things we might not otherwise like. I’m not suggesting we fund a Madrassa that teaches ‘Islam is wonderful and all infidels should be executed’ but neither can we expect to dictate that Afghanistan citizens adopt a classic Western education. This has to be a long term commitment. Evidence suggests that the better educated a country is, the better its chances of improving its quality of life and creating a peaceful future.

Government

As has been mentioned throughout this report, one of the biggest weaknesses in Afghanistan today is the lack of a credible government. It is riddled with corruption, filled with cronyism, and generally staffed by incompetent leaders. Whether the US Government eventually decides on a Go Big strategy or adopts the Go Deep recommended by this paper, the Afghan Government is the same weak link. In either case we have no choice but do our best to reduce corruption and facilitate viable leadership.

In recent days we have seen the limits of our best efforts towards rehabilitating the Afghan government with the disaster that was the 20 August presidential elections, most infamously represented by the public firing of former US Ambassador Peter Galbraith by his UN boss Kai Eide over allegations of massive voter fraud. This state of affairs must be turned around as the cost of government failure is too high.

Even if we have to roll back some of the sovereignty we previously gave to the Afghan Government, we must do so in order to establish credible, functioning institutions, without which the people of Afghanistan – and indeed even the governing ministers – will never develop a sense of trust in their rulers. We must make significant demands of reform and progress from governing officials and hold them accountable for accomplishing them. If they fail, there must be consequences. On this point Mr. Rahimi said:

We must absolutely make Afghans accountable for what they do and what they don’t. Our failure to do this is one of the greatest points of frustration Afghan citizens have with the West in general but the US in particular. Most people in Afghanistan know what’s going on, they know of the vast corruption at every level, particularly in the national government. They see the United States as being the world’s preeminent

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military power, with the ability to do whatever it wants, and yet it does nothing to force the Afghan politicians to do what is right. Therefore, they conclude, the Americans are complicit in the corruption and knowingly permit it. This must stop; the US must hold these people accountable.

Many will complain that we are moving backwards by placing demands on the government and then forcing them to comply if they fail, but to persist in granting no-strings-attached permission for Afghan officials to continue with their corrupting ways we inadvertently become complicit in their failure. We must take the risk in requiring more accountability from their leaders. As time goes by and they demonstrate effectiveness, we will gladly return full sovereignty. If we do this we actually have the chance to regain a degree of trust and confidence from the people of Afghanistan. By making an aggressive commitment to demand accountability from Afghan leaders while training their security forces to adequately defend the Afghan people, we will have a chance to create the hope necessary upon which success in Afghanistan can be built.

Risk

Whether the President eventually chooses Go Big or Go Deep, he will have to accept risk. If it's Go Big, he risks the dangers cited throughout this paper. But even if he were to agree with the recommendations of "Go Deep," he accepts risk. In my view if things went bad for Go Big, the cost to the United States would be enormous and have far reaching consequences, likely for many years to come. If he chooses Go Deep and things don't go well, however, the consequences, while real and significant, would cause less harm to the United States and give us a better chance of walking away with a few bruises – as opposed to the broken limb or a sucking chest wound I believe would result from a bad Go Big.

Go Big Risk

COIN v. CT

The first major risk from Going Big occurs if the President agrees to pursue a counterinsurgency vice a counterterrorism strategy. If he agrees with General McChrystal and sends in 40,000 additional troops, we will likely exacerbate the anti-American feelings as we will strongly fuel the historic fears of the people of yet another long term occupation; this would be very hard to refute given we've already been there eight years. But another significant risk to accrue is that analysis suggests that even the high number of 40,000 is about 60,000 *too few* to provide the minimum necessary force levels to successfully accomplish a counterinsurgency strategy. By inserting 40,000 we risk upsetting the local population upon whom we rely for support but providing too few to militarily defeat the Taliban.

ANSF

By promising to train 400,000 ANSF we risk trying to create too big of a force too quickly, putting soldiers into the field to protect the Afghan people who are not adequately trained, thus potentially causing more harm than help. Already there is growing anecdotal evidence that part of the increase of support for the Taliban has been anger at the unprofessionalism and abuse of power affecting many in the Afghan National Police. As previously pointed out, it takes seven to 10 years to 'grow' an effective company commander and upwards of 15 years for a battalion

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commander. By putting literally hundreds of new battalions and thousands of new companies into the field without a properly educated and experienced leadership, we increase the risk of fielding an incapable force that makes matters worse.

In addition to the issue of ability and leadership, however, is what happens to these 400,000 men when we eventually leave? It is unlikely that the international community is going to pay into perpetuity the billions of dollars each year necessary to keep these men under arms. What happens if there is a deepening of the international economic crisis and suddenly all that money dries up as individual Western nations find it impossible to continue funding the ANSF? There will be potentially hundreds of thousands of military aged males, flush with military training, suddenly out of a job in a country that presently has a staggering 40% unemployment. We saw what happened in 2003 Iraq when hundreds of thousands of military aged males were suddenly thrown out of work: the birth of an insurgency.

Government

As has been addressed in several sections of this paper, the risk of failed government is real regardless of which strategy is chosen. I will point out, however, that if the Go Big strategy does not include the aggressive insistence on our part of holding the Afghan Government responsible for their actions and demands more effective governing from them, the risk of failure will be greater. The greatest failure we should fear, however, is not necessarily the fall of this government, but rather their continuing to operate as a corrupt organization that is not viewed as legitimate by their people. In that case, even if they stand we will lose.

American Control of Terrain: boon to Taliban?

One of the unquestioned assumptions is that if we send 40,000 more combat troops we will gain the upper hand against the insurgent forces. I contend it is not the iron-clad truth most believe. By sending in large numbers of "foreign" troops, we unwittingly play directly into the historic fears of the Afghan people and appear to validate the Taliban's IO campaign. Evidence suggests many of the insurgent fighters gain their reason for living from our presence and from fighting us. They possess the ability to view themselves in heroic, patriotic ways in this existential struggle, much as did the Partisan movements in France, Yugoslavia, and White Russia during World War II. The underground fighters of World War II were willing to endure any hardship, pay any price, and sacrifice their lives to gain their freedom. We must deny the Taliban this huge psychological advantage.

Presently the number of bases and outposts in Afghanistan are fairly limited and well known to insurgents. They are able to plan and prepare for attacks at their leisure. Not surprisingly, the US units that endure the greatest number of attacks are those located in the mountains near the Afghan/Pakistan border. If we deny them the easy targets we presently do in the form of large troop concentrations, they will be thrown off balance. If we remove the large unit presence but instead become a shadowy, elusive, and hard to find enemy – who are able to find the insurgents where they live, never giving them sanctuary, and denying them the honor of fighting against the superpower, many of them will again suffer the depression and distress that was described in the October 5th 2009 *Newsweek* article previously cited.

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But if the United States increases its troop strength by upwards of nine additional combat brigades, it will provide an increase in the number of targets the Taliban can attack, it will increase their sense of obligation to answering their generation's call to oust a major power, and it will strongly reinforce the sense of patriotism they gain from engaging in an existential struggle on their home soil.

Consider our own insurgent experience against the British Crown and the passion with which we were willing to sacrifice everything we had to defeat the colonial power and force them from our land. We can argue that the reasons for rebellion were different, and of course they were, but the fervor that Afghan people love their land and want the 'foreign invader' to leave is just as strong as was our desire to kick the Red Coats back to England. Just as we were willing to risk annihilation against the world's greatest power of that age, so too are many in Afghanistan.

Troop Exhaustion

It must be frankly stated that to Go Big will almost certainly result in significant numbers of American combat troops remaining deployed in Afghanistan for another five to 10 years. The significance and difficulty of that fact cannot be casually dismissed: the continued deployment of America's combat forces year after year with no end in sight will, at some point, create genuine damage.

In an October 8th article in the London Times, two US Army Chaplains told reporters that the troops in their unit were becoming increasingly jaded. According to the article, "American soldiers serving in Afghanistan are depressed and deeply disillusioned, according to the chaplains of two US battalions that have spent nine months on the front line in the war against the Taleban. Many feel that they are risking their lives — and that colleagues have died — for a futile mission and an Afghan population that does nothing to help them, the chaplains told *The Times* in their makeshift chapel on this fortress-like base in a dusty, brown valley southwest of Kabul. 'The many soldiers who come to see us have a sense of futility and anger about being here. They are really in a state of depression and despair and just want to get back to their families,' said Captain Jeff Masengale, of the 10th Mountain Division's 2-87 Infantry Battalion."

I returned from combat duty in Iraq only months ago (leading an advise and assist team training Iraqi border forces) and I witnessed precisely this attitude among more Soldiers than most realize. After eight years of combat, the mental strain of deployment after deployment has taken a toll. Already our fighting troops know that this situation is going to persist for two more years at a minimum since we know we aren't going to leave Iraq until the end of 2011. Moreover, combat troops are painfully aware that even absent a decision to further increase troops in Afghanistan there is no end in sight for that mission. If we were to increase the number of our troops by more than 10 brigades (as General McChrystal recommends), the 'deployment after deployment' scenario will effectively become a permanent feature of being in the military for the foreseeable future, the consequences of which are difficult to predict.

There is no historical precedent with which to compare our current situation. As has been noted in several articles on the subject, this war in Afghanistan will soon be the longest running in

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American history. But even the current occupant of the top spot – Vietnam – was fought with a different Army. At that time the size of the US Army fluctuated between one million and over two million from which deploying Soldiers could be pulled, and of course, there was a draft that constantly replenished the pool of those eligible to be sent to combat zones. Today's force, by contrast, is substantially smaller and filled with volunteers.

Already, troops in the combat divisions and brigades are deploying once every 12 to 18 months; this pace simply cannot be maintained indefinitely. It is a testament to the patriotism and loyalty to country possessed by the men and women of our Armed Forces that even after eight years of fighting we have seen neither a precipitous drop in retention nor an inability to meet recruiting quotas. But how much longer will that remain the case?

If we Go Big, it must be done with the understanding that we are taking a risk that an unknown number of additional years of wear and tear on the force will not cause an exodus of troops and a serious diminution of its ability to defend the nation. I first joined the Army as a Private First Class almost 25 years ago, and the level of frustration and anxiety I see in the Force today far exceeds what I saw even as recently as my 2005 deployment to Afghanistan. If, when the end appears in sight for deployments to Iraq we commit to maintaining over 100,000 in Afghanistan for years into the future, we subject our Armed Force to an unknown but significant risk. No one can predict when our Force will reach the "deployment exhaustion" tipping point, but we play a dangerous game if we assume one will never occur.

Looking for the Lost Quarter: Increased Global Freedom of Maneuver for Terrorists

Finally, we must consider the opportunity costs Go Big will impose on our country. We are all familiar with the old story of the man looking for the quarter he lost under a lamp post because the light was good there – despite the fact he dropped it elsewhere. With the enormous amount of national power we are focusing on Iraq and Afghanistan, we limit considerably our ability to hunt for terrorist organizations and personnel elsewhere. That is one of the least-considered but potentially greatest strategic mistakes we are making today.

While we intensely focus on Iraq and Afghanistan, spending tens of billions of dollars each month, have hundreds of thousands of military and civilian personnel physically deployed there, and devote the efforts of thousands of members of the intelligence community in the United States to finding and fighting insurgent and terrorist organizations and fighters, terrorists have scattered to locations all over the globe, where they are far less disturbed – or even unconstrained – by our counter-terrorist efforts.

We know, for example, that presently terrorist groups and individuals already operate in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, parts of India, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Sudan, Yemen, Somalia, Oman, Horn of Africa, UAE, Algeria, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, and certainly many others. With the enormous resources we are devoting to the fights in Iraq and Afghanistan, we have far too few assets, personnel, and money remaining to properly search the rest of the globe. It is beyond doubt that those terrorist organizations that genuinely wish to harm the United States and its

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allies will go to parts of the world to plan and train for their attacks that have limited access, are generally inhospitable, and have little to no governance.

Giving just a glimpse of how pervasive terrorist links are, the 9/11 Report included a passage explaining how bin Laden's network had operational nodes throughout the globe. Note how pervasive and extensive this network was – but then consider also that this is only one terrorist group:

Al Qaeda continued meanwhile to collaborate closely with many Middle Eastern groups – in Egypt, Algeria, Yemen, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Somalia, and elsewhere – with which it had been linked when Bin Laden was in Sudan. It also reinforced its London base and its other offices around Europe, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. Bin Ladin bolstered his links to extremists in South and Southeast Asia, including the Malaysian-Indonesian JI and several Pakistani groups engaged in the Kashmir conflict. The February 1998 fatwa thus seems to have been a kind of public launch of a renewed and stronger al Qaeda, after a year and a half of work. Having rebuilt his fund-raising network, Bin Ladin had again become the rich man of the jihad movement. He had maintained or restored many of his links with terrorists elsewhere in the world (p. 67).

One of the strongest arguments made by many supporters of Go Big is that we can't "quit" Afghanistan or the risk to our country of new terrorist attacks will increase. I argue that to the contrary, we currently accept considerable risk in that we are myopically focused on these two areas at the expense of the rest of the world, and if we increase our involvement in Afghanistan we make it more likely that terrorist organizations will take advantage of the opportunity to plan and train elsewhere for the next big attack. It is common sense, really: if a bad guy knows the huge numbers of cops are looking for bad guys in areas A and B, they'll go to X, Y, and Z – where there is little to no police presence – to plan their evil deeds far from anyone's view.

Go Deep Risk

Taliban Control of Terrain: boon to al Qaeda?

It is certain that if the recommendation to redeploy the bulk of American troops is accepted that Taliban fighters will occupy parts of Afghanistan. One of the greatest charges against Go Deep is that the Taliban will give safe haven to their ideological brothers Al Qaeda where they own the ground. But is that a safe assumption? I contend it is not.

One thing the 9/11 Commission Report unambiguously states is that prior to our October 2001 attack into Afghanistan the Taliban gave considerable aid and comfort to al Qaeda:

The Taliban seemed to open the doors to all who wanted to come to Afghanistan to train in the camps. The alliance with the Taliban provided al Qaeda a sanctuary in which to train and indoctrinate fighters and terrorists, import weapons, forge ties with other jihad groups and leaders, and plot and staff terrorist schemes... (bin Laden) also provided support to and benefitted from the broad infrastructure of such facilities in Afghanistan made available to the global network of Islamist movements. U.S. intelligence estimates put the total number of fighters who underwent instruction in Bin Ladin-supported camps in Afghanistan from 1996 through 9/11 at 10,000 to 20,000 (p.66-67).

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Would the Taliban, then, open those same doors in areas they may control in the future? That outcome is anything but certain. In the October 5th *Newsweek* article previously cited it is instructive how the Afghan Taliban members now refer to Arab al Qaeda. An insurgent named Maulvi Mohammad Haqqani said of al Qaeda: “We gave those camels [a derogatory Afghan term for Arabs] free run of our country, and they brought us face to face with disaster.” While the Taliban certainly have no love for the United States, neither do they feel any sense of obligation to paying for an al-Qaeda launching pad with their blood. They described in excruciating detail the horror they experienced and the slaughter they suffered from American attacks in October 2001 when they ruled the country.

The Taliban knows well that dispersion and being ghost-like are the only things keeping them alive today. From painful experience they know that if they come out into the open for any length of time in numbers, they become vulnerable to precision attack. In the event they were ever to return to power, they would be fully aware that they would again become easy targets to precision attacks by unseen American planes and missile fire. Ironically, we gain a meaningful amount of leverage over the Taliban movement the day they exist in large numbers in known locations (i.e. government buildings). What possible motivation, then, would the Taliban have in providing al Qaeda safe haven if they know such an act – which we would communicate in the clearest of terms – would result in helpless slaughter of the type suffered in October 2001? While conventional American military might is vulnerable to insurgent warfare, it is devastating to any force that can be identified on the ground.

Defeat the Taliban?

One of the first questions a reasonable person would ask when considering my recommendation to redeploy the bulk of our conventional forces in 18 months is how will we be able to defeat the Taliban? Short answer: we won't. Not completely, at least.

Certainly if we could determine the outcome of things simply by making declarative statements we would require that we deal both al Qaeda and the Taliban a decisive defeat, handing the Afghan government the keys to a secure and docile country on our way to the airport for the trip home. Unfortunately, reality is a messy thing. Because of all the historical baggage of the region and the cultural factors that are irrevocably attached to both insurgent fighters and Afghan citizens, the presence of the hundreds of thousands of American and Western troops makes it virtually impossible to “defeat” the insurgents because historically speaking, the presence of so many foreign troops over such a long period of time creates the very insurgents from which we are trying to defend the population.

What we must strive to do, then, is to train and mentor the Afghan Police and Army to become a capable force that respects the rule of law and assist them in protecting their civil population. Their mere presence, as contrasted with ours, does not itself create more insurgents. It is crucial, nevertheless, that the policemen and soldiers genuinely respect the population. Evidence suggests that corrupt officials and ANSF personnel have, in too many cases, turned some Afghan people against the government because of the unjust and corrupt way they have dealt with the population.

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We have to work very hard to eliminate this behavior because, no matter which strategy one chooses, it will ultimately be the ANSF that either makes or breaks peace in Afghanistan. If their security forces follow the rule of law and protect the population, then the number of Taliban fighters will dwindle to manageable numbers as those presently filling their ranks will no longer be motivated to fight but will return to their centuries-old traditions of taking care of their families; they desire to live in peace, raising families like many in the West.

ANSF

In recommending the ANSF keep its forces at the presently agreed number of 134,000 for the Army and 80,000 for the Police, Go Deep accepts risk that such force levels will be sufficient to defend the government and protect the people. This risk is minimized by the presence of American intelligence units, Special Forces, Air Forces, and robust and focused Advise and Assist combat units. There is also the assumption that with the removal of most US combat units, the insurgency will lose some of its steam as it loses some significant IO leverage in that it will be hard to argue that America is an occupying power when our physical presence there dwindles. Nevertheless, even these force enablers and mitigating factors do not guarantee that the Afghan National Security Forces will prevail.

Government

In addition to the list of risks previously cited that apply to the GIRoA regardless of which strategy the President chooses, Go Deep entails a unique risk of its own. If the United States withdraws most of its combat troops then the Afghan Government will undoubtedly feel less secure. As specified, however, Go Deep does not envision a complete withdrawal for the foreseeable future as some degree of capable combat forces will remain in Kabul to ensure the safety of American personnel (Air Force, Special Forces, State Department personnel, other civilians, etc). The GIRoA will also, of course, have its own Army and Police Force. Thus the danger to the government physically located in Kabul will be mitigated but not eliminated.

Conclusion

One of the greatest features of our country is the limitless ability of its people to imagine the impossible and then turn it into reality. Creativity and imagination borne of intelligence, knowledge, and passion can lead us to extraordinary accomplishments, but if the work is not done with a healthy dose of realism and humility could lead the visionary to catastrophe. There is no doubt that in a world without constraints, the United States government would desire to defeat the Taliban, fully eradicate the al Qaeda network, establish a functioning democratic government, introduce a sustainable economy, provide for women's rights, significantly reduce illiteracy, and leave Afghanistan in the near future as a viable state, able and willing to live with its neighbors in peace. Regrettably, we live in a world most assiduously filled with constraints.

We must at all costs avoid the danger of "believing our own press" as it were, and fall victim to the belief that we can accomplish in Afghanistan whatever we want simply by declaring our intentions. Every problem cannot be solved with brute force. With a sober mind we must

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instead thoroughly analyze all relevant aspects of the mission in Afghanistan, recognize the limits of our power, and use our extraordinary imaginative powers of our people to find unique and viable solutions. After such an analysis, it is my opinion that Go Big contains far too many risks, is based on some dubious assumptions, and could actually result in a worsening of the situation. Going Deep, however, acknowledges that some circumstances favor the enemy, seeks to mitigate those disadvantages, identifies our advantages and seeks to exploit them to our maximum advantage to recommend a course of action that, while containing manageable risk, gives us the most realistic chance of accomplishing the President's stated objectives.

Epilogue: Surging Misconceptions

Though this report has primarily focused on Afghanistan, I would like to conclude with a brief word about Iraq. Many well known defense and international affairs experts have filled the airwaves and opinion pages in an effort to weigh in on this debate. There is one argument being used by advocates of Go Big making the rounds right now which seems to have near universal acceptance: that the surge in Iraq was a meaningful success and ought to serve as a model in certain regards for our current efforts in Afghanistan. But this argument makes a number of assumptions about the Iraqi surge which are inaccurate. If these erroneous assumptions are not exposed and corrected they could lead political leaders to reach flawed decisions with potentially serious repercussions in Afghanistan.

The reigning conventional belief in Washington is that the successful 2007 surge in Iraq was primarily the result of General David Petraeus imposing his will on the enemy, changing on-the-ground tactics with the publication of a new counterinsurgency manual (which he wrote), pushing the troops off the secure bases and out into the cities and villages to protect the people, and above all, empowered by the deployment of 20,000 'surge' troops. There is no doubt that all of those factors played a meaningful role in the tactical success of the surge. There is likewise no doubt, however, that those factors did not alone account for the success and much evidence suggests that they were not even the primary reasons.

Had it not been for the presence of three factors external to the United States, the introduction of those surge troops and the changing battle tactics would have had little to no real effect on the insurgency. These factors were 1) when a tipping point was reached by the people of Iraq when they turned against al Qaeda and the foreign fighters for conducting a campaign of terror not only against the Western coalition, but also the civilian population; 2) the resulting formation of what became known in the West as the "Awakening" movements; and 3) the unilateral cease-fire announced by firebrand insurgent leader Muqtada al Sadr and his Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) fighters.

Apparently little known by most outside of the US military, the Awakening movement started originally in Anbar province, not by General Petraeus, but by Arab tribal leader Sheik Abdul Sattar Buzaigh al-Rishawi. The Shiek had become so enraged when al Qaeda, infamously led at the time by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, murdered his father and killed or kidnapped his three brothers that he approached American forces and offered to form an armed wing to kill al Qaeda fighters in 2005. His efforts became so successful that Marine and Army leaders began

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expanding the program to other areas in 2006, more than a year before General Petraeus took command of Iraq. To his credit, Petraeus recognized the utility of the program and wisely sought to expand it by paying, by some estimates, 100,000 former Sunni insurgent fighters to protect their neighborhoods – and not fight against US Forces. He called the program “Sons of Iraq”.

But it is crucial to understand that the Awakening Movement and Sons of Iraq were only possible because the Sunni population in Iraq had passed a tipping point in regards to their willingness to support al Qaeda and other foreign fighters. Remember that the insurgency effectively started in the fall of 2003. From that point until the formation of Shiek Abdul Sattar’s Fighters, most of the Iraqi population – including most of those who would later join the various anti-al Qaeda movements – fought against the American coalition. The Iraqi population didn’t like the foreign fighters even in the beginning, but initially their dislike of the invading US Army trumped their disdain for al Qaeda. Had those foreign fighters not alienated the Iraqi population it is very unlikely the Awakening movement would ever have started.

This significance of that fact cannot be overstated. Over the next year and a half, the Awakening Movement and Sons of Iraq (SOI) programs would take an estimated 100,000 fighters off the street – men who had been fighting against the US. Absent the SOI program, those fighters would have continued resisting Coalition efforts.

Additionally, the cease-fire unilaterally announced by al-Sadr’s Iranian-backed, Shiia-dominated JAM removed an enormous source of violence from the heart of Baghdad. It is estimated that JAM fighters numbered in the tens of thousands at the time of the ceasefire. This ceasefire was not initiated by the United States but announced unilaterally by al-Sadr. There were many reasons for this declaration – his desire to gain power through political means and the fact that he lost hundreds (if not thousands) of men in battle against US Forces – but the fact that it occurred at the same time the SOI program removed so many Sunni fighters it combined, in a remarkably short period of time, to remove upwards of 120,000 insurgent fighters from the COIN battlefield.

Moreover, particularly in any discussion of a similar ‘surge’ effort in Afghanistan, it is important to note that the vast majority of the 20,000 surge forces in Iraq were sent to the single city of Baghdad, not spread around the country. At that time the greatest concentration of enemy fighters was without doubt centered in the capitol. Had the SOI not taken so many fighters off the streets in Anbar Province and other Sunni-dominated areas, 20,000 would have been far too few to stem the insurgent tide.

These facts are critical when considering what impact the imposition of an additional 40,000 surge troops might have today in Afghanistan. First, while numerous reports confirm that few Afghan citizens have any love for the Taliban, there is little to suggest that they are widely despised and none to suggest the population as a whole has reached a tipping point whereby they are ready to support the coalition against the Taliban. Instead, as Mr. Rahimi emphatically told me, with the current lack of faith in and hope in either the GIROA or the United States, the majority of its people are riding the fence and unwilling to support NATO efforts.

Second, due to the history and geography of Afghanistan, there is little prospect that an “SOI” program in Afghanistan can be formed to replicate the success enjoyed in Iraq. Unlike in Anbar

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In Afghanistan today, even the most optimistic supporter of Go Big would not suggest that the people have passed any tipping point leading to a willingness to oppose the Taliban and offer even tepid support for the coalition. There is presently no successful “SOI”-type operation that would remove large numbers of enemy fighters from the streets, valleys and mountains. No large segment of the insurgency has yet to announce a ceasefire with allied forces. The insurgency in Afghanistan today is spread over hundreds of thousands of square miles of inhospitable terrain and even 40,000 additional fighters would likely be insufficient to militarily stem the tide. In short, conditions on the ground in Afghanistan of late 2009 are nothing like that of Iraq of early 2007 and there is little reason to believe the tactical success of the Iraq surge can be repeated today in Afghanistan.

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