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## Obama's War

Jeffrey D. McCausland  
*Dickinson College*

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## Obama's War

Jeffrey D. McCausland

August 17, 2009

*Introduction by David Speedie:*

We publish today the second set of papers under the U.S. -Russia strand of our [U.S. Global Engagement Program](#).

These papers—two from Americans, two from Russians—embrace an ambitiously broad spectrum of issues, covering U.S./NATO-Russia cooperation on Afghanistan and Central Asia. Four major points may be seen to emerge from the spirited discussion in the papers:

1. The United States/NATO and Russia have clear and urgent common interests in promoting long-term stability in Afghanistan. These include containing and defeating "radical extremist" forces, reversing the noxious effects of the opium trade from that country, and preventing instability in Afghanistan from impacting an extended region. Despite these shared interests, cooperation between Russia and the West is "episodic," rather than strategic or systematic.
2. Afghanistan must be seen, not in isolation, but in a broader regional (Central Asian) context. This is true both in terms of the importance of the region (strategic location, energy resources) and of the formidable challenges (instability, economic reversals). Russia and the West both see advantages and interests to be protected (thus the recent competition for a military presence in the otherwise marginal Kyrgyzstan), but should avoid a new "Great Game" of promoting self-interest over shared concerns.
3. Afghanistan is now, as one paper writer states, "Obama's War." From campaign pledge to return to the "right" war, the President has: appointed new military and diplomatic leadership in Kabul, including a special envoy; invested in an enhanced troop presence; and made strenuous, if incomplete, efforts to drum up international support for the military and reconstruction effort in Afghanistan.
4. The very future of NATO may be viewed through the Afghan lens. The (lack of) commitment of NATO partners, given military and economic constraints, exemplifies the strains and stresses on an alliance that has expanded both geographically and in terms of mission. While the American and Russian paper writers differ considerably in their views of NATO's continuing relevance and role, even the American view of NATO as the most "successful" and "durable" military alliance in history is tempered by the urging to revisit and reconsider the original NATO treaty, which current challenges may be rendering obsolete.

—David Speedie, Director, U.S. Global Engagement Program

The other three papers in this set are:

- [State of Denial? NATO at 60 and the War in Afghanistan](#)
- [Prospects for U.S. -Russia Cooperation in Central Asia](#)
- [Pakistani, Afghan, and Iranian Factors of Influence on the Central Asian Region](#)

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*"There is no more solemn duty as President than the decision to deploy our armed forces into harm's way. I do it today mindful that the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan demands urgent attention and swift action."<sup>1</sup>*

—President Barack Obama, February 17, 2009

In the opening days of June 2009 President Obama placed the finishing touches on his plans for a renewed effort in the war in Afghanistan. He appointed LTG Stan McChrystal, an officer with a broad background in special operations and counterinsurgency operations, as his new military commander in the country and the lead units of his planned increase in American military forces (by over 21,000) arrived in Afghanistan. LTG (Ret.) David Barno, U.S. Army of the National Defense University described LTG McChrystal's appointment recently:

We are putting a super bowl team on the field, perhaps for the very first time in Afghanistan. He is as good as we got. He is the six million dollar man in terms of military senior leadership and he is exactly the right man to have there at this point in time.

Almost simultaneously, the President delivered a major speech to the Muslim world in Cairo that attempted to rebut widespread anti-Americanism in the Arab world and support the diplomatic portion of the new strategy. These events, coming on the heels of his naming Richard Holbrooke as his special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, selecting retired general Karl Eikenberry as U.S. ambassador to Kabul, as well as his administration's efforts to gather more international support and assistance for Afghanistan, have now truly made this Obama's War.

The new president was confronted by a growing crisis not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan upon his arrival in the White House. The new administration clearly believed that the Bush team had seriously miscalculated in the aftermath of the fall of Kabul in November 2001. Basking in its apparent success, President George Bush and his advisers assumed they had "won" the war in Afghanistan and could turn their attention to preparing for an invasion of Iraq. This cavalier optimism was shattered by the resurgence of the Taliban, after a two-year lull.

The situation in January 2009 after seven years of war was described in dire terms by the United States Institute of Peace in its report, "The Future of Afghanistan," that was made available to the newly arriving Obama administration. The authors of the report observed that the U.S. and its partners had shortchanged Afghanistan by focusing on short-term goals that were pursued without a cohesive strategy or a clear understanding of the way the poor, decentralized country of Afghanistan works.<sup>2</sup> As President Obama and his administration lead the nation and their coalition partners in this renewed effort, what can be learned from the past and what are the challenges that must be overcome if his new strategy *and* team are to be successful?

### **Afghanistan—Graveyard of Empires?**

Much is made of Afghanistan's reputation as a "graveyard of empires," and any commander ordered to conduct military operations there would be well disposed to consider the cruel fate many of his predecessors have suffered. Alexander the Great entered Afghanistan following his conquest of the Persian Empire. In the aftermath of the Battle of Guagamela in 331 BC that sealed the Persian's fate he pushed further towards Bactria in modern northern Afghanistan. He ultimately made his way to Kabul and the Panshir Valley to engage Bessus, the self-proclaimed successor of the last Persian emperor. Despite his victory over Bessus, Alexander and his army endured continuous attacks by various tribes despite his marriage to the daughter of a leading Afghan warlord. In a letter to his mother, Alexander described his encounters with Afghan tribesmen.

I am involved in the land of a "Leonine" (lion-like) and brave people, where every foot of the ground is like a wall of steel, confronting my soldiers. You have brought only one son into the world, but everyone in this land can be called an Alexander.<sup>3</sup>

In the 19th century the British Empire was engaged in three wars in Afghanistan. These conflicts were part of London's pursuit of the so-called "Great Game." British leaders sought to prevent a Russian intervention in Afghanistan that might threaten British interests in India. In fact some historians have chronicled British efforts in Afghanistan as stretching from the Treaty of Gulistan (signed on October 24, 1813) to the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907.<sup>4</sup>

The most ill-fated of these conflicts was the First Anglo-Afghan War (1838-1842) that began with the British installing a new Afghan "emir." Confronted by a growing threat from local Afghan forces, British Major General William Elphinstone (better known to his men as "Elphey Bey") was forced to withdraw from Kabul in January 1842. He departed the city with 16,500 soldiers and civilians heading east towards the garrison in Jalalabad, 110 miles away. The column was repeatedly attacked along the way by Afghan tribesmen, and only one British survivor, Dr. William Brydon, managed to make it to safety.<sup>5</sup>

On Christmas Eve 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and repeated the British error by installing an unpopular "emir," Babrak Kamal, on the "throne" in Kabul. Initially, it appeared that the Russians would be far more successful than either the British or Alexander and quickly bring stability to the country. This proved to be untrue. By 1985, the Soviet 40th Army in Afghanistan had grown from an expeditionary force to around 120,000 troops dispersed throughout the country. But with support from the United States and many countries throughout

the Arab world the so-called "mujahedeen" had grown to over 250,000 full- or part-time soldiers. The war continued until February 15, 1989 when Russian General Boris Gromov led the last Soviet military convoy out of Afghanistan. Over one million Afghans were killed during this conflict and an equal or greater number wounded. Six million were driven into exile, mostly in Pakistan. The Soviets admitted to losing about 15,000 soldiers killed in action, several hundred thousand wounded, and tens of thousands dead from disease.<sup>6</sup>

But while a clear understanding of history is important, it remains an imperfect metaphor. Some foreign interventions have been successful. In the early 13th century, Genghis Khan and his Mongol armies subdued Afghanistan's two major cities. Babur, founder of the Mughal Empire in India, captured the throne in Kabul in 1504, and the British were successful in the Second Afghan War. Furthermore, the defeat of the Soviet Union occurred in large measure due to the massive support provided the mujahedeen by principally the United States and Saudi Arabia. This was compounded by Moscow's misguided intent to conquer the Afghans by whatever means necessary, which is clearly not the U.S. objective today.

Even the recent history of American military operations in Afghanistan may not be clearly understood. In many ways Washington is now embarking on its "third" war in Afghanistan. On December 7, 2001 the first American war ended as the last Taliban stronghold fell at Kandahar. At that moment, however, only 110 CIA agents and a few hundred American Special Forces soldiers were operating in the country.<sup>7</sup> Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his military commander, General Tommy Franks, believed that the combination of precision weapons, space based surveillance, and global communications had brought about a transformation in the conduct of war. But in reality this was a war of both "technology *and* surrogates." Few Afghans recall this war as an invasion by the United States. Rather they recall it as a success by the Northern Alliance of Afghan tribes against the Taliban with American assistance.

This was followed beginning in 2002 with a "war of hope" which had goals that were far beyond the means provided. As previously suggested, the United States and its allies deployed enough forces and provided sufficient resources in order to maintain the situation at roughly the same level as late 2002. In military parlance the war in Afghanistan became an "economy of force operation." The Bush administration focused its attention on plans to invade Iraq and became embroiled in a conflict in that country that far exceeded its initial expectations.

Despite these facts the Obama team has a few clear advantages as it begins this "third" war, that is now regional in character and will, in the words of the President, "employ all elements of our national power to fulfill achievable goals in Afghanistan."<sup>8</sup> The Afghan population has a clear understanding of the nature of Taliban rule, and they largely reject it. In a 2005 ABC/BBC poll that was conducted four years after the fall of Kabul, 80 per cent of Afghans expressed a favorable opinion of the United States and an equal number supported the American-led effort to topple the Taliban. In a subsequent poll conducted in February 2009, 58 percent of Afghans identified the Taliban as the greatest threat to their nation and only 8 per cent said it was the United States. Furthermore, 47 percent had a favorable opinion of the United States while only 7 percent approved of the Taliban.<sup>9</sup>

While such polls can appear reassuring, they must be taken with a degree of skepticism. Opposition to the Taliban does not necessarily translate into support for President Karzai and his government. The war in Afghanistan also has its roots in ethnic conflicts between Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and other groups as well as between the various tribes in these groups. It is further fomented by virulent hostility of the Sunnis for the (mainly Hazara) Shia and between rival views of the Sunni faith.

### **What Does a New Strategy Really Mean?**

Strategy is the art of carefully assessing ends, ways, and means. First, what are the "ends" of the strategy or the goals the nation is trying to accomplish? Second, what are the "ways" or policies that are formulated in order to move the nation in the desired direction? Finally, what are the "means" or resources available to the government of any nation that can be devoted to securing these objectives, and how can they be husbanded in a fashion to maximize their potential?

In determining the "ends" of strategy, lessons from the past are useful. Karl von Clausewitz, the famous Prussian strategist, advised that it is imperative to pursue one "great decisive aim with force and determination." This is as true today for the Obama administration as it was for European leaders during the Napoleonic era. While calls for the creation of a Jeffersonian democracy and market economy in Afghanistan were appealing in 2002, the reality in 2009 is that these objectives will not be realized for many decades if ever. American goals now must be greater security and enhanced government services that are provided more broadly throughout Afghan society.

President Obama appears to have acknowledged the wisdom of Clausewitz's recommendation. On March 27, 2009 the President described the goals for his new strategy in much more minimalist terms than his predecessor. He stated the goal was to seek to "disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future."<sup>10</sup> As David Sanger noted in his book, *The Inheritance*, the new administration sought to insure that Afghanistan would never revert to being a "Petri dish for terrorists" as it

had prior to 9/11.<sup>11</sup>

The President further noted that the "ways" of this new strategy must encompass an integrated approach that maximizes the effectiveness of the military, diplomatic, political, and economic tools available that will be discussed later in this analysis. President Obama stated at the onset, however, that assistance to Afghanistan would be expanded in three key areas. First, as previously mentioned, additional American forces would be dispatched. Second, the United States would shift the emphasis of its mission to training, equipping, and increasing the size of Afghan security forces (to include the police as well as the military). Third, the new strategy would expand civilian efforts to promote good governance and economic development throughout the country.<sup>12</sup> Finally, American efforts also placed a renewed emphasis on increasing international support for military operations in Afghanistan as well as reconstruction.

In this regard, however, one key resource may now be in short supply. The passage of seven years and the loss of both blood as well as treasure have placed a strain on the "endurance" of the people of Afghanistan, the United States, as well as our European allies. This was clear during the NATO Summit in April. President Obama was only able to convince European leaders to make minor increases in their forces deployed to Afghanistan, and these additional forces will only remain until the Afghan elections in August.

Many analysts have suggested that European leaders have explained their support for U.S. operations in Afghanistan since 2002 as support for the United States and *not* as a reflection of their own respective national interests. Consequently, it will be difficult to maintain European collaboration at current levels and perhaps impossible to secure any significant expansion in their support for the new Obama strategy.<sup>13</sup> As a senior European diplomat remarked, "we do not wish to be the first to leave Afghanistan, but we would not mind being second or third." Pressure on European politicians to reduce their support for NATO efforts in Afghanistan are also driven by harsh global economic realities and a likely increase in violence in Afghanistan that will result in higher casualties. Taliban propaganda uses this theme frequently as it continues to remind the Afghan people that the international community effort will not last, and eventually Europeans and Americans will depart as they did in the 1990s.<sup>14</sup> There is a saying that is frequently heard in Afghanistan that "NATO and the United States have the watches but the Taliban has the time."

In executing the new strategy it is also crucial to underscore that Afghanistan is not Iraq. Some lessons may be applied, but each must be examined carefully against the tremendous historical, cultural, and economic differences between these two societies. For example, Afghanistan is larger than Iraq in both population and land area. It is also a less urbanized society with at best primitive road networks and means of transportation. This will make it more difficult to provide security to the Afghan population. Both military and civilian members of the Obama administration have identified this goal as key to maintaining popular support for the Karzai government as well as the overall success of the new strategy.

### The "Ways" of Strategy

LTG McChrystal, the new commander in Afghanistan, stated during his confirmation testimony:

Afghans face a combination of challenges—a resilient Taliban insurgency, increasing levels of violence, a lack of governance capability, persistent corruption, a lack of development in key areas, illicit narcotics and malign influences from other countries. There is no simple answer. We must conduct a *holistic* counterinsurgency campaign and we must do it well.<sup>15</sup>

These views have been echoed by others. Secretary of State Clinton briefed allies on the new strategy at an International Conference on Afghanistan held in the Netherlands on 31 March. Representatives from over 90 countries participated in this event and in a final statement the conference chairmen welcomed the administration's new strategy as important to "re-energizing our common efforts in Afghanistan." Participants also identified three goals that are clearly in alignment with LTG McChrystal's remarks: "to promote good governance and stronger institutions; to generate economic growth; and to strengthen security and enhanced regional cooperation."<sup>16</sup>

But what are some of the key aspects of the economic, political, diplomatic, and military "ways" that must be properly synergized in the holistic fashion required?

In economic terms there is broad agreement among experts that after decades of war Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries on the planet, with a per capita income of less than \$800 annually. It has a population of roughly 31 million people (about two million more than Iraq). But currently, four million Afghans are refugees in Iran and two million more are refugees in Pakistan. The nation needs basic infrastructure, education for the population, and is highly dependent on foreign aid, agriculture, and trade with neighboring countries. Living standards are among the lowest in the world. A large percentage of the population lacks adequate housing, clean water, electricity, medical care, and jobs. It is estimated that by 2009, 60 percent of the working population will

be unemployed.<sup>17</sup> In many ways Afghanistan requires "development" and not "re-development" assistance.

There has, however, been some progress. Since 2002, the United States Congress has appropriated \$32.9 billion for reconstruction in Afghanistan. Other nations and international institutions have pledged over \$25.4 billion during the same period.<sup>18</sup> Due in large measure to this foreign assistance real GNP growth has been roughly 6 percent since 2006. Still the scale of the economic challenge remains enormous. One expert observed that if the international community worked hard and devoted massive assistance to Afghanistan for 15 years, we might raise the economy to the level of Chad.

The economy is also distorted by the massive increase in the production and sale of illicit narcotics that many argue may now account for over half of the nation's annual GNP. Estimates suggest that since 2007, Afghanistan has produced more than 9,000 tons of opium (95 percent of the world's total crop), making it the world's largest heroin producer. Expanding poppy cultivation and the growing opium trade generate between three and four billion dollars in illicit economic activity and may employ over two million people.<sup>19</sup> Over 648 metric tons of pure heroin could potentially be produced if the entire opium crop were processed.

As a result, profits from the drug trade are a key source of revenue for the Taliban. Some experts estimate that the drug trade provides over \$250 million dollars to the Taliban annually and is also encouraging widespread corruption in the Karzai government.<sup>20</sup> Taking heed of these staggering statistics, Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke recently announced a significant change in the administration's strategy for dealing with the drug problem in Afghanistan. The new effort will focus on circumventing the political and military benefits the Taliban receives from the tens of millions of dollars in the illegal drug trade, rather than the complete eradication of opium. It will seek to destroy the "middlemen" who process, transport, and sell the narcotics rather than alienating the Afghan farmer.

Economic progress is closely tied to domestic political development and creating a belief in the minds of Afghans that the government in Kabul is seeking to improve their daily lives. In fact, many experts believe that the drug problem is so damaging that any hope to improve the economy and establish any sense of honest governance is dependent on at least restraining further increases in poppy production. This connection between good governance and economic development is also reflected in the attitudes of individual Afghans. Sixty-seven percent of Afghans polled in the last year believe they have had no personal benefit from any of the foreign aid provided the country since 2001. Over 85 percent believe corruption is a major problem.<sup>21</sup> An international expert echoed this sentiment when he observed that the Head of the Counter-Corruption effort for President Karzai had spent over two years in a Nevada penitentiary for selling illegal drugs in the United States.

The 2009 national elections are an important step in Afghan political development and enhanced government legitimacy. Many experts argue that in Afghanistan as well as Iraq, establishing the rule of law remains the most fundamental requirement to establishing the legitimacy of any new government. This still remains a task for future Afghan political leaders. As the Obama team implements its new strategy every effort must be made to encourage sound governance and a reduction in corruption. Still it is also important to insure that Afghans are at the center of political and economic recovery efforts. Many believe our failure to do so in the past damaged the Afghan people's collective dignity, pride, and institutional trust.<sup>22</sup> Empowering the Afghan people both politically and economically is also important in very practical terms. For example, one foreign health worker costs more than 200 Afghan health workers to maintain.

Clearly, the new strategy must also include renewed diplomatic efforts regionally as well as globally. Here the Obama administration may actually have some advantages. No nation will benefit from a return of the Taliban to power in Kabul coupled with increased instability in neighboring Pakistan. Policymakers may be encouraged by a greater convergence between American interests and that of other nations.

For example, the interests of Iran and the United States are much closer in Afghanistan than they are in Iraq. The Iranian leadership has no love for either the Taliban or al Qaeda, and a war nearly erupted between the two countries during the Taliban's rule. Tehran is also experiencing a dramatic increase in drug addiction among its young population that is exacerbated by the flow of drugs across the border from Afghanistan. Some have placed the number of Iranian drug users at four million out of a population of 84 million. A recent report by the United Nations stated that Iran has the highest proportion of opiate addicts, over 15 countries in the world.<sup>23</sup>

Many observers believe Russia encouraged the government of Kyrgyzstan to terminate its agreement with the United States that allowed American aircraft use of the Manas air base which remains important to supplying forces in Afghanistan.<sup>24</sup> The agreement, however, was subsequently renewed with the United States due to a tripling of the payment for use of the Manas Base.<sup>25</sup> This may suggest that the United States and Russia have some common interests in the future of Afghanistan. Moscow is also adversely affected by the spread of illegal narcotics and clearly fears the destabilizing influence of Islamic fundamentalism throughout Central Asia. Russian leaders would also be opposed to any possibility that the overthrow of the Pakistani government might result in

the Taliban having access to nuclear weapons.

American diplomatic efforts must also focus on another major regional actor—India. The new U.S. leadership must seek to reduce the historic animosity between Pakistan and India. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, both India and Pakistan must realize they face a common threat that is much more severe than the danger they pose each other. The ultimate goal must be an existential shift in the mind of Pakistanis to eliminate India as their primary enemy. Such a shift will allow Pakistani leaders to refocus their military efforts on internal stability and improvements to the nation's dire economic situation. This will be an extremely difficult undertaking that will require some resolution of the nearly 60-year issue of Kashmir. Some experts have also argued that for the Pakistani Army to give up the Indian threat would remove the whole basis of its economic power and position as arbiter in Pakistan's politics.

Still, the central diplomatic focus will be Pakistan. This is why Richard Holbrooke was appointed special presidential envoy to both Afghanistan as well as Pakistan, and the Obama administration has tripled non-military aid to Pakistan to \$1.5 billion per year for the next five years. These efforts reflect a truism that while the war can be "lost" in Afghanistan, it can only be "won" in Pakistan.

Clearly, the Obama administration must find more creative means to bolster the civilian government in Pakistan and disrupt the safe havens that Al Qaeda and the Taliban enjoy in the Pakistani tribal areas. Still these efforts have to be accomplished in concert with both the Pakistani government and military to insure that the domestic legitimacy of President Zardari is not further undermined. Consequently, LTG McChrystal and his staff must exercise greater care in the use of drone attacks and special operations raids against suspected Taliban or Al Qaeda targets on Pakistani soil. These attacks have too frequently achieved tactical success only at the expense of civilian casualties, leading to the alienation of the Pakistani population.

Many experts have taken solace from the recent efforts by the Pakistani government and military to not only stop the spread of Taliban control in their country, but also reverse it. Pakistani military success in its offensive against the Taliban presence in the Swat Valley has been impressive, and it also appears that the suicide bomb attacks organized by the Taliban against Sunni mosques and school may have alienated many local tribes. But the Zardari government now estimates that over two million people have fled the fighting, creating perhaps the largest refugee crisis in the nation's history.<sup>26</sup> While the Pakistani government has begun an official relief effort, it appears hampered by poor internal coordination, lack of financing, and shortages of equipment. Clearly, a failure to adequately deal with this crisis could result in a serious backlash of public resentment. Ironically, this could accomplish the undermining of the legitimacy of the Zardari government that was a goal of the Taliban and al Qaeda from the onset. Even if the military operation in the Swat Valley is successful, it also remains to be seen whether or not the Pakistani leadership will continue the advance against the Taliban and al Qaeda in Waziristan and the tribal areas.

Finally, the military "way" in Afghanistan will receive perhaps the most public attention and be critical to success in this conflict. Still it is important to underscore that a "military-centric" strategy is destined to fail. The counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan must focus on protecting the people and over time transition to local forces.<sup>27</sup> The metric for success cannot be how many Taliban are killed, but rather increased levels of security for the population.

The 21,000 additional American troops dispatched to Afghanistan will bring the total to nearly 60,000 U.S. forces when all have arrived later this year. NATO forces will remain at about 30,000 with some additional European forces being added this summer to provide greater security for the impending national elections. This "surge" in available forces will assist in providing more security for the population, but expanded military operations against the Taliban and al Qaeda will also result in greater military as well as civilian casualties. All agree that every effort must be made to minimize the latter. Recent American airstrikes have resulted in allegations of large numbers of needless civilian deaths that have outraged many Afghans.<sup>28</sup> American officials fear that rising civilian casualties could blunt popular support for American military efforts, and Secretary of Defense Gates has characterized the killing of innocent civilians as "one of our greatest strategic vulnerabilities."<sup>29</sup>

With the arrival of LTG McChrystal, the military command structure is also being reorganized to have two major subordinate commands that reflect the stated priorities. One three star headquarters will command day-to-day military operations and be headed by LTG Dave Rodriguez. The other will focus on the other important security task—the training of both an expanded Afghan Army as well as the National Police forces. According to recent reports, the Afghan Army has roughly 83,000 troops and is planned to increase to 134,000 by 2011. The Afghan National Police is planned to achieve a final end-strength of 82,000 by the end of this year and has about 73,000 officers assigned now.<sup>30</sup>

Clearly, American and international efforts to create sound Afghan security forces have been inadequate, despite the fact that this endeavor has been ongoing since 2002. The Army is fairly well-disciplined, widely respected by the Afghan population, and many of its combat brigades can conduct independent operations. It is clearly the

most effective military force in the nation's history but still lacks basic equipment. The Obama team may be surprised to learn that the training, equipping, and paying of the Afghan Army has accounted for less than 10 percent of American expenditures in Afghanistan since 2002. Furthermore, despite the number of American and European troops present in the country, the program still lacks 2,000 trainers.<sup>31</sup>

The police, however, are characterized by many experts as nearly disastrous. A recent United Nations report on the Afghan National Police noted that "the number of adequately trained personnel remains low, and problems of absenteeism and corruption persist." The report continued that "unless support is provided in the near term by the international coalition in the form of police mentors and equipment support, the Afghan National Police will continue to fall further behind in their development, increasing the amount of time to develop an effective force."<sup>32</sup>

Obviously, effective Afghan national security forces are essential to achieving the goal of protecting the population and increasing support for the Kabul government. In the long term, such forces are also much more practical. The cost to support one American soldier in Afghanistan is equal to the cost of supporting 70 Afghan soldiers. But better trained and better equipped forces are not enough. The Karzai government and its successors must continue to improve the quality of governance to garner the loyalty of the forces that are being created.

## Conclusions

There is no doubt that the "central front" in the war that began on September 11, 2001 has shifted from the banks of the Euphrates to the Durand Line and Hindu Kush mountains. The Obama administration has announced its strategy, selected its team, and begun a dramatic increase in the resources that will be devoted in the coming years to seeking "success" in Afghanistan. For better or worse this is now truly Obama's War.

In prosecuting this war, it will be incumbent on the President's National Security Adviser, retired general Jim Jones, to insure that the efforts of the key players—Vice President Biden, Secretaries Clinton and Gates, Generals Petraeus and McChrystal, Special Envoy Holbrooke, as well as Admiral Mullen (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs) compliment each other. Failure to do so could result in a lack of both unity of effort and strategic clarity. A recurrent analysis must be made to examine if progress is being made in the direction of the "ends" of the strategy, how well the "ways" are being synergized, and whether the "means" are sufficient. This effort must also include a periodic risk assessment that seeks to achieve an independent, detached view on how the effort is proceeding so the President can be alerted when things go awry.

In the final analysis success may well depend on the application of four factors that are essential to the execution of any strategy. First, *patience*, as the conflict in Afghanistan is likely to continue at least beyond the presidential elections in 2012. Second, *persistence*, as America and its partners work to not only build the Afghan economy but also encourage an adequate level of honest governance by its political leaders. Third, *adaptability*, since the Taliban and al Qaeda remain a dynamic and *not* static adversary. Changes in American military strategies will likely result in adjustments by the enemy that must be either anticipated or overcome. American policy leaders would also be wise to remind themselves of the powerful influence that terror can have on a population. Finally, *honesty*—democracies have historically found it difficult to fight long, seemingly inconclusive conflicts. President Obama must be honest with the American people about successes *and* failures in Afghanistan if he is to maintain their support for this difficult struggle.

The new Obama team should be equally wary not only of those predicting impending doom, but also of those that see success in the near future. This may be the greatest lesson of the American experience since 2002. Success in Afghanistan will only be achieved when true stability is brought to this country that has suffered the horrors of war for so many decades. This accomplishment must then be made part of a larger effort towards a more peaceful region and world. In the final analysis, the young president would be wise to consider the words of Polybius, the Greek historian:

For though, as I have many times remarked, success in a campaign and victory over one's enemies are great things, it requires much greater skill and caution to use such successes well. Accordingly, you will find that those who have gained victories are many times more numerous than those who have made good use of them.<sup>33</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Office of the White House Press Secretary, "Statement by the President on Afghanistan," February 17, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> United States Institute of Peace, *The Future of Afghanistan* (Washington: USIP, January 8, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Frank Holt, *Into the Land of Bones: Alexander the Great in Afghanistan* (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2005).

- [4](#) For a thorough summary, examine Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game* (New York: Kodansha Intl, 1990).
- [5](#) Saul David, *Military Blunders* (London: Robinson Publishing, 1997), pp. 1-12.
- [6](#) Milton Bearden. "Afghanistan Graveyard of Empires," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2001.
- [7](#) David Kilcullen. "If We Lose Hearts and Minds, We Will Lose the War," *The Spectator*, May 20, 2009.
- [8](#) Office of the White House Press Secretary, "Statement by the President on Afghanistan," February 17, 2009.
- [9](#) Peter Bergen, "Graveyard Myths," *The New York Times*, March 28, 2009.
- [10](#) Prepared remarks of President Barack Obama, "A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," March 27, 2009.
- [11](#) David E. Sanger, *The Inheritance* (New York: Harmony Books, 2009), p. 170.
- [12](#) Prepared remarks of President Barack Obama, "A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," March 27, 2009.
- [13](#) Julian Lindley-French, "Enhancing Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations—A Report of the Global Dialogue Between the European Union and the United States" (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2009), pp. x and 18.
- [14](#) Remarks by His Excellency General Abdul Rahim Wardak, National Defense Minister of Afghanistan, Emerald Express Conference, Marine Corps University, Quantico, Virginia, April 8, 2009.
- [15](#) Samantha L. Quigley, "Afghan Strategy Requires 'Holistic' Approach, General Tells Senate," American Forces Press Service, June 2, 2009.
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