

Obama's War: Prospects for the Conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Bruce Riedel



The Centre for International
Governance Innovation
Centre pour l'innovation dans
la gouvernance internationale

Addressing International Governance Challenges

SUMMARY

On coming into office, President Barak Obama immediately assembled a team to assess the US situation in Afghanistan and formulate a strategy for the mission. Heading up this team was Bruce Riedel, a former adviser to Presidents Clinton and Bush and a former CIA officer. This paper, based on a CIGI Signature Lecture given by Mr. Riedel in April 2010, discusses the history of the US war on terror since 9/11, specifically the actors involved in initiating the al-Qaeda declaration of war on the US and its allies, and the recent terrorist plots and attacks linked to al-Qaeda, which demonstrate that al-Qaeda and its allies continue to mount terrorist attacks despite the efforts of the US to thwart terrorism.

President Obama inherited a war in Afghanistan that was unsuccessful, under-funded and lacked a clearly defined strategy. The response he developed for Afghanistan is a complex one involving regional and international policies — particularly in Pakistan, where al-Qaeda has a network of insurgent groups — but it also involves military force, diplomacy and changing public opinion concerning the US. This paper assesses the progress that Obama has made in Afghanistan and Pakistan 15 months after taking office, and considers whether the US will actually be able to win the war on terror.

ISSN 1921-2119

The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Centre for International Governance Innovation or its Board of Directors and/or Board of Governors.



Copyright © 2010 The Centre for International Governance Innovation. This work was carried out with the support of The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), Waterloo, Ontario, Canada (www.cigionline.org). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution — Non-commercial — No Derivatives License. To view this license, visit (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). For re-use or distribution, please include this copyright notice.

About The Afghanistan Papers

The Afghanistan Papers, produced by The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), are a signature product of CIGI's research program on Afghanistan. CIGI is an independent, nonpartisan think tank that addresses international governance challenges. Led by a group of experienced practitioners and distinguished academics, CIGI supports research, forms networks, advances policy debate, builds capacity and generates ideas for multilateral governance improvements. Conducting an active agenda of research, events and publications, CIGI's interdisciplinary work includes collaboration with policy, business and academic communities around the world.

The Afghanistan Papers are essays authored by prominent academics, policy makers, practitioners and informed observers that seek to challenge existing ideas, contribute to ongoing debates and influence international policy on issues related to Afghanistan's transition. A forward-looking series, the papers combine analysis of current problems and challenges with explorations of future issues and threats.

We encourage your commentary on these papers and welcome your suggestions for the series. Please visit us online at www.cigionline.org to learn more about the Afghanistan project and all of CIGI's research programs, events and publications.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This paper is based on a CIGI Signature Lecture given by the author on April 29, 2010.

My subject today is about what I believe is probably the single most difficult foreign policy issue facing the United States and Canada today: the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan — the war against al-Qaeda and the struggle against terrorism.

I'd like to start by taking you back 12 years to February 23, 1998, to the small city of Khost in eastern Afghanistan. On that day, Osama bin Laden, a Saudi, Ayman al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian, another Egyptian, a Pakistani and a Bangladeshi declared war on the United States of America and on its allies. They pronounced a judgment which few people paid attention to at the time:

To kill the Americans and their allies, civilian and military, is the individual duty incumbent upon every single Muslim in all countries in order to liberate the holy Al Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque in Mecca.

This is a remarkable statement. It's not every day you read that someone has declared war on the United States and

its Western allies. Since this declaration of war was made 12 years ago, al-Qaeda and its allies have carried out a remarkable terror campaign across the world — from Bali to Casablanca, from Riyadh to Islamabad; virtually every major city in the Islamic world has witnessed appalling acts of terror. This group has also carried out the first attacks upon the continental United States by a foreign power since 1814 and 1815, when the British army and the Royal Navy sacked Washington and tried to do the same to New Orleans.

The first attack was launched from Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, on December 14, 1999. It was a plot by an Algerian who had immigrated illegally to Montreal, who planned to blow himself up at Los Angeles International Airport on New Year's Eve in 1999. He was stopped at Port Angeles, Washington, and the plot was uncovered.

In the last six months of 2009, we saw an unprecedented wave of attacks by Al Qaeda on the continental United States. Two attacks are famous to everyone: the massacre in Fort Hood, Texas, which killed 13 American soldiers; and the failed attempt to blow up Northwest Air flight 253 as it was coming in over Southern Ontario to Detroit, Michigan, on Christmas Day.

The most worrisome plot, however, exceeded both of those strikes. It was a plot that centred around an Afghan-American named Najibullah Zazi. Zazi went to

About the Author

Bruce Riedel is now a senior fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution in Washington. After earning degrees in history from Brown and Harvard, Mr. Riedel entered US government service in 1978 as a Middle East specialist. He was, thereafter, involved in every Middle East development of significance in US foreign policy until his retirement from the government in 2006. During that period, he advised Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush from posts in the White House, the Defense Department and the CIA.

Mr. Riedel became a senior adviser on the Middle East to (then) Senator Barack Obama during the 2008 presidential campaign. After the election, he was asked by the president to chair the group charged with developing a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. That report was released on March 27, 2009. Since the report was released, Riedel has published prolifically and spoken with his trademark candour all over the world about the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He is also the author of recent books on al-Qaeda and US policy toward Iran. Bruce Riedel remains the Obama administration's most influential non-governmental adviser to the president on the Middle East.

Afghanistan in 2008 to join the Taliban and fight the war in Afghanistan. The Taliban took one look at Zazi and said, “You’re too important to waste on the deserts of the Hindu Kush. We’re going to teach you how to make bombs and send you home to America.” That is exactly what they did. Zazi recruited two compatriots and they learned how to make bombs, which they produced for their attack. They planned to attack New York City on the anniversary of 9/11 on September 14, 2009. The three men intended to go to Grand Central Station, Times Square Station and one other station, then blow themselves up at nine o’clock in the morning.

Zazi and one of his accomplices have pleaded guilty to all of this in a free trial — not in Guantanamo — but at a trial with defence attorneys. The mastermind in al-Qaeda who sent the trio to the US was a man named Rashid Rauf. Rauf is a British citizen born in Birmingham, England of Pakistani origin. He is well-known to al-Qaeda watchers as the man who masterminded the attack on the London Metro on July 7, 2005, killing 52 people and wounding over 700. Rauf was also involved in the failed 2006 plot by al-Qaeda to simultaneously blow up seven or as many as 10 jumbo jets as they were flying across the Atlantic from Heathrow Airport to New York City, San Francisco, Chicago, Washington, Montreal and Toronto — a plot foiled by British intelligence just weeks before it was to take place.

The war against al-Qaeda and its allies is now the longest war in American history — longer than the Vietnam War and the American Revolution. Why do I begin with all of this? If you want to understand President Barack Hussein Obama’s policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan, this is where he starts. For him, this is ground zero in determining what he should do as president. He told me this personally, but if you don’t believe me, this is what he said the purpose of the war in Afghanistan is on March 27, 2009: Our goal, as he put it then, is to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaeda’s headquarters in Afghanistan and Pakistan and ensure that it no longer is a sanctuary for terrorism against America and the rest of the world. You cannot understand what we are trying to do in Afghanistan and Pakistan without understanding the threat that underlies it.

At this point, let me introduce an important caveat. The president asked me to chair the strategic review of American policy in February and March 2009; however, I’m no longer a member of the US government. I’m

neither a spokesman for the president nor for the US government. To be candid, I am a strong supporter of President Obama and have been an adviser to him since February 2007, when his national security adviser for his presidential campaign, Tony Lake, asked me if I would serve as an unpaid voluntary adviser to the campaign. In the interest of pure candor and honesty, I should also tell you that I went home that night and said to my wife Elizabeth, “This is going to be fun, but the junior senator from Illinois is not going to become the next president of the United States. Senator Clinton will clean his clock in Iowa and New Hampshire.” So when I give you my predictions, bear that in mind.

I’m going to discuss three things. First, what did President Obama inherit in January of 2009? What did he become heir to when his predecessor, George W. Bush left office? Second, how is the US doing 15 months later? Can we see any sign of progress or defeat, or is it too soon? Third, can we succeed in this task? And when will we know if we’re starting to succeed?

OBAMA’S INHERITANCE

Let me start with the inheritance. It can be summed up simply as a disaster. President Obama inherited a disaster in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and in the struggle against al-Qaeda. A war that should have been over and won by 2003 if properly resourced and strategized, had drifted off course, was under-resourced, festered and had gotten worse.

Wars don’t get better by trying to fight them on the cheap — they get worse. And that’s what America did in Afghanistan — tried to fight the war at a bargain price. The US offered Afghanistan, a country which was desperately poor before 30 years of war and foreign invasion and terror, less than a billion dollars in development aid in 2002, 2003 and 2004. And the results are exactly what you would expect. America underfunded the international security assistance force, the NATO mission, for years. Our attention drifted from the Hindu Kush to the Valley of Mesopotamia and the US is still reaping the catastrophic results of that decision. By taking our eye off the ball, al-Qaeda was able to regroup and reinvigorate itself. A group that was in disarray in December 2001 was able to re-establish itself, building franchises and links to affiliates and allies from Morocco to Indonesia in the Islamic world.

Today, the al-Qaeda senior leadership — Osama bin Laden, Ayman Zawahiri, their propaganda instrument called As-Sahab, which means “in the clouds” in Arabic, which suggests that it hovers somewhere over the Himalayas — are still alive. They’re active and they’re continuing to plot mayhem against the US. Think back to the Zazi plot discussed earlier. In his guilty plea, Zazi confessed that Rashid Rauf told him he was working for the elders of al-Qaeda, referring to Osama bin Laden and Ayman Zawahiri.

Most importantly, al-Qaeda was able to successfully embed itself into a network of alliances of different terrorist and insurgent groups operating along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Al-Qaeda had long-standing relationships with some of these groups such as the Afghan Taliban, which was their host on 9/11 and Lashkar-e-Taiba, the group that attacked Mumbai in November 2008. It is this network — a syndicate of other terrorist groups — that actually makes al-Qaeda the formidable enemy it is today.

As a consequence, South Asia has eclipsed the Middle East in the last couple of years as the epicentre of international terrorism. The US National Counterterrorism Center, an institution created in the aftermath of 9/11, in its 2009 annual report on the war against terror around the world, stated that South Asia has now surpassed the Middle East in terms of the number and ferocity of terrorist attacks.

In 2009, the number of civilian deaths and wounded in Afghanistan, solely from acts of terror, exceeded 7,000 — up 44 percent from 2008. In neighbouring Pakistan, according to the US National Counterterrorism Center, the number of dead and wounded civilians from acts of terror was in excess of 8,600. A Pakistani think tank recently reported even higher numbers — 25,000 Pakistani civilians were killed or wounded in acts of terror in 2009. The Chief of Pakistan’s Army Staff, General Kayani, said recently that 10,000 Pakistani soldiers died or had been wounded in 2009 fighting the militants along the Afghan-Pakistan border, including 74 officers of the Pakistani intelligence service, the Inter Services Intelligence directorate (ISI).

Immediately following his election, President Obama sent Vice President Joe Biden to Kabul on a quick fact-finding mission. The vice president reported that he had spoken to the US ambassador, US military commanders, President Karzai and others in the NATO alliance in Afghanistan, asking them the same simple questions, “What’s our goal here? What’s our mission? What’s our strategy?” and he

never received the same answer from any of them — a clear indication of how badly the war had deteriorated.

The numbers tell the story. According to US Central Command, in 2004, the number of enemy-initiated attacks was less than 50 a week. By 2006, there were over 100 enemy initiated attacks per week. By 2007, the number was well over 200. By 2008, we broke 300 and we were up over 400 in 2009. General Stanley McChrystal in August 2009, famously provided his report to the president on the state of the war. Thanks to Bob Woodward and *The Washington Post*, all of us can read that report I recommend that you to do so — it’s a sobering and devastating indictment of how we let this war get away from us.

Here is an example from the annexes of that report entitled *Detention Facilities*. General McChrystal wrote that the number one detention facility in Afghanistan, Bagram, was effectively no longer under the control of the NATO coalition. In fact, inside the prison it was al-Qaeda and the Taliban that controlled what went on. He goes on to say that the Bagram detention facility had become the single most important location for the recruitment and radicalization of al-Qaeda’s supporters in Afghanistan.

I am not an expert on counterinsurgency, but if you are fighting an insurgency and have lost control of the detention facility where you put captured insurgents, you are in a deep, deep hole. As bad as Afghanistan is, even more worrisome is the situation across the Durand Line — the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan — in Pakistan. Afghanistan is, after all, a small country on the far side of the world, landlocked and desperately poor. Pakistan is a country of over 180 million people, the second-largest country in the Islamic world in terms of population, with the fastest-growing nuclear arsenal in the world. Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal has doubled since 1998 to over 100 nuclear weapons. It has a new plutonium facility coming online shortly, which will significantly increase its ability to build more nuclear weapons.

Pakistan has been in a state of conflict with its neighbour, India, for 60 years. For good reasons and bad, the Pakistani establishment and the Pakistani military feel they need nuclear weapons as a deterrent. Pakistan’s military establishment also has a complex relationship with the network of terrorist groups operating along the Afghan-Pakistan border discussed earlier. We know this because the US helped to introduce this relationship back in the 1980s in the Afghan war against the Soviet Union.

That war was the germ from which this present terrorist syndicate developed.

Pakistan has been closely tied to some of these groups. It was the “midwife” of the Afghan Taliban in the 1990s and has long-standing ties to Lashkar-e-Taiba and others. It is also at war with these groups now more than ever before.

Recently, the United Nations (UN) issued a report requested by the government of Pakistan on the circumstances surrounding the death of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 2007. That report is worth reading because it illustrates, in dramatic ways, the complexity of the relationships between the Pakistani Army, Pakistani Intelligence Service and these terrorist groups over the years. The UN concluded that the ISI covered up and interfered with the investigation of the murder of Ms. Bhutto, because it would have shown that the army could have done far more to protect her from al-Qaeda.

Pakistan today is in the midst of an extraordinarily complex transition — from a decade of military rule to what Pakistanis hope will be democracy. This is the fourth time in Pakistani history it has attempted to build a functioning, democratic government. The US has an enormous stake in their success. If democracy is to succeed in the Islamic world, it must succeed in Pakistan; however, it’s an extraordinarily difficult challenge for Pakistan.

The complexity of these problems and their dangers were underscored for President Obama only days after his election with the November 2008 Mumbai attack. That attack lasted for 72 hours, killed 160 and wounded thousands — the single most deadly terrorist attack since 9/11. We now know an American citizen, David Headly, did the scouting for the operation and was deeply involved in the planning and orchestration of that attack. Headly has recently pleaded guilty to six counts of murder and to being associated with al-Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Taiba. From 2005 to 2008, he travelled five times from Chicago in the US to Mumbai in India and to Lahore in Pakistan, undertaking the reconnaissance for the attack. Headly measured everything, went to every target, stayed in the hotels and also checked the tidal flow to see if small boats could be delivered. We also know that after the Mumbai attack, he was outsourced by Lashkar-e-Taiba to al-Qaeda to plan an attack on Copenhagen, Denmark, twice meeting with senior al-Qaeda leadership in Waziristan on the Afghan-Pakistan border to carry out the attack.

This was Obama’s inheritance — a war that was spiralling downwards and a struggle against terrorism that was not succeeding. President Obama does not have a time machine. He is not able in 2009 to go back to 2003 or 2004 and say, “Hey, let’s fix it, let’s do it right.” He fundamentally had two choices: quit or give up, taking the risk of al-Qaeda having an even larger safe haven in Afghanistan; or try to salvage the mission, continuing to attempt to make it succeed. He chose the latter option.

OBAMA’S STRATEGY TO SALVAGE THE MISSION

The response President Obama developed is a complex one: it involves regional and international policies; and it involves military force, diplomacy and public diplomacy. One facet at the high end is increased attacks against the leadership of al-Qaeda in Pakistan using Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) drones. This was supposed to be a clandestine covert operation, but everyone in Washington talks about it, so I can too. In 2007, we launched seven drone attacks against al-Qaeda, missing seven out of seven times. In 2008, the Bush administration launched roughly 20 attacks and began to score some important hits. President Obama ordered a massive increase in the periodicity of these attacks and in the infrastructure to support them. There were over 50 drone attacks in 2009 and some very significant hits. The pace is even faster today and by the end of 2010, the US will exceed over 100 drone attacks in Pakistan.

The directors of the CIA have an unfortunate habit of constantly overselling the drones — they persist in writing the obituary of al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda is not going to die from drone attacks. Drone attacks are an important weapon — but they’re a tactic, not a strategy. They are definitely having an impact. Let me provide you with one dramatic example. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the number two in al-Qaeda, used to issue an audio or video message every other week for three years. He talked about everything: the global financial crisis; the housing bubble in the US; climate change; and every terrorist incident that occurred. But al-Zawahiri hasn’t been on the air since December — he hasn’t made a peep except for one brief message. The man who I used to refer to as the “Chatty Caddy” of international terrorism has either suddenly developed laryngitis or a severe case of worrying about where the next hellfire is going to land.

This targeted movement against the leadership of al-Qaeda has not only happened in Pakistan — it's happened in Iraq and in Yemen. However, these targeted attacks are not going to bring victory. We need to also include the other end of the spectrum — the war of ideas, the battle for the hearts and minds of the Islamic world. Al-Qaeda has developed a complex and sophisticated narrative to explain why every Muslim should go out and murder every Crusader and Zionist, which by the way, is you.

The US did not fight back against the al-Qaeda narrative for seven years. If anything, our actions reinforced its appeal. We conceded the war of ideology — saying they hate our freedoms, they hate our way of life. The battle was ceded because we failed to explain to Muslims why they shouldn't support al-Qaeda. Now, we are engaged in that struggle. We've ended torture. We're trying to close Guantanamo. We're trying to get out of the business of secret prisons and secret prisoners.

President Obama's speech in Cairo to the Islamic world was the epitome of this approach — trying to fight back against the narrative of our enemy with our own ideas. What did the president say in that speech? How did he begin? He attacked the most fundamental point of al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda's indictment of us starts with the notion that America is an imperialist power bent on controlling the Islamic world. President Obama began his speech by saying the US was born in revolution against imperialism. We fought a revolution against colonialism. We do not want bases in Iraq. We do not want bases in Afghanistan. We want to bring our troops home. Al-Qaeda doesn't like this either and they have fought back hard. Their message is that Barrack Hussein Obama is not change you can believe in. He is the same old American politician. This is why they love to show him in a clip visiting the Western Wall in Jerusalem wearing a kippah. The implication is "See? He's just like all other Americans, really a Zionist."

Words alone will not win the battle of ideas. Words need to be backed up by actions. This is why the president has engaged so intensely in trying to bring about a two-state solution in Palestine — it's vital to the overall strategy against al-Qaeda. And this is why, behind the scenes — very quietly and very subtly — he is trying to bring about a resolution to the conflicts between India and Pakistan, including Kashmir. He won't say this in public, but fortunately, I can. The good news today is that Prime Ministers Singh and Gilliani have met and agreed to resume their dialogue. That's an important move in the right direction.

The most visible, most costly and most controversial part of Obama's strategy is the effort to stabilize Afghanistan and Pakistan, and stopping the freefall into chaos. He has ordered 60,000 more American troops to go to Afghanistan and tripled the number of civilian advisers working in Afghanistan, most of them in agriculture. He has also tripled economic assistance to Pakistan to US \$1.5 billion a year and committed America to a five-year program. He has increased military assistance to Pakistan as well. If we want Pakistan to fight the militants, we need to give them the tools to fight the battle, and that includes night-vision devices, helicopters and other important pieces of equipment. This is embedded in a larger regional diplomatic strategy to try to engage every country that has an interest in stabilizing Afghanistan and Pakistan — from China to Saudi Arabia, Europe to Canada, Japan to Australia — in this effort. And we have a considerable number of supporters on the battlefield.

Over 40 countries are now engaged in supporting the war in Afghanistan with troops on the ground, including important Muslim countries like the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Jordan and Egypt. At the peak of all of this is intense strategic engagement with our partners — the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan. We can't stabilize Afghanistan and Pakistan — only Afghans and Pakistanis can do that. We need to have partners to work with.

WHAT PROGRESS HAS OBAMA MADE?

So, what's the report card 15 months after President Obama took office? As I've already stated, the pressure today on al-Qaeda's senior leadership is unprecedented. They are under more real pressure than at any time since early 2002 and they're feeling it. We saw this on December 30, 2009 when they fought back and sent a Jordanian triple agent into the CIA's forward operating base, ironically, in the Afghan city of Khost where this all began in 1998. It was the second-worst day in the history of the CIA — seven Americans killed in addition to a Jordanian intelligence officer fighting with us in this war.

The US is far from being able to declare victory over al-Qaeda. In Pakistan, Pakistani society, the Pakistani establishment and the Pakistani Army have moved from a state of denial where they were two years ago — "Yeah, there's a problem, but it's not our problem. They may be here, but it's not a threat to us." — to a recognition that this Jihadist "Frankenstein" is the single most important threat to the freedoms that Pakistanis desire.

This is why the Pakistani Army sent 10,000 of its soldiers into harm's way last year. The ISI, which has a notorious reputation, lost 74 of its officers last year in this battle. Is it complete? Is it all that we could hope for? No, it's not. We still have a distance to go. There's still ambiguity. Pakistan is a complex country; it has complex interests and it has to try to calculate what is in its own best interests over the long haul. And Pakistanis have come to the conclusion that they can't rely on America. Why? The last 60 years of US-Pakistani relations have been a rollercoaster. We've either been madly in love with each other or we've broken up in an ugly divorce and are fighting over child custody. We've gone up and down. The consequence of this is simple — Pakistanis don't believe America is reliable because America is *not* reliable when it comes to Pakistan. Turning that thinking around is not something you do in 15 months.

Pakistani polls show that Pakistanis consistently believe the US is the number one threat to their country's future — beating out India as the “bad guy” in Pakistan. When you outpoll India as the bad guy in Pakistan you are, once again, in a deep, deep hole — but we're trying to climb out of it. And Pakistan, as it has moved towards a more forthright struggle against the jihadists, is also continuing to move forward in its democratic process. Think about Pakistan's situation — trying to fight a war while also trying to create a democracy.

Pakistan passed a critical constitutional amendment in April 2010 which changes, fundamentally, the power system in that country. It is one of the most important political developments in the country's history and Pakistan is to be applauded for doing that.

How about Afghanistan? It's not pretty; we haven't turned that one around. The military campaign is still not going in the right direction and, worse than that, in 2009 we had a very significant political setback. The presidential election, which was supposed to be an opportunity to reinvigorate the Afghan government, giving new legitimacy to the Afghan government, setting a path against corruption in Afghanistan, was a disaster — a fiasco — due to massive election fraud.

President Karzai had over one million fraudulent ballots passed for him. Even by Florida's standards that's election cheating. He got caught and he got away with it. Instead of new legitimacy, we had a setback. This may be the Achilles heel of President Obama's strategy. We may look back one or two years from now and say, “We lost it then. We needed a partner and we didn't get it.”

We can't blame this one on the Bush administration — this happened on President Obama's watch. If we wanted to get rid of Karzai, last year was our chance. If we have buyer's remorse because we picked him in 2002, it's a little late. We're stuck with this car and have to work with it. It's time to move beyond leaking nasty stories about him, true or untrue, and to building a relationship with him.

The US needs to agree with Karzai on a political strategy. There is no military solution to the war in Afghanistan. We hope a military situation may, create the conditions for political progress, but we don't yet have a strategy for that and one needs to be agreed upon with President Karzai.

On the battlefield in Helmand and Kandahar it's far too soon to say how we're doing. We are only now beginning to get all of the forces that the President Obama promised to be deployed to Afghanistan in December 2009 into the theatre. It's difficult to get there — Afghanistan is about the farthest away you can get from the US. The logistics are extraordinarily complicated. Every gallon of gasoline American and NATO troops use in Afghanistan costs roughly US \$26 by the time it arrives in Kabul. If you think the price of gas is high when you fill up, look at how high it is there. We won't know whether the counterinsurgency strategy we've embarked upon is working until at least 2011. Be very skeptical of anyone who tells you it's working before then. Counterinsurgency is not like the battle of Stalingrad or the D-Day landings. You don't know at the end of the day if you've won. It takes months to learn whether or not you're succeeding.

CAN THE US WIN THE WAR ON TERROR?

Can we succeed? It's going to be difficult. Afghanistan and Pakistan are extremely damaged societies. Thirty years of war have done untold harm to them. We must be realistic about the end state we are hoping to achieve. We are not building a shining city on the hill or a perfect democracy. Rather, the end goal is to build stable countries in South and Central Asia. That's the standard we should use to measure success.

I am convinced that al-Qaeda can be defeated. It is a relatively small organization, and more importantly, it appeals to a very small minority of Muslims. The vast majority of Muslims reject al-Qaeda and everything it stands for, especially its use of terror and violence, for many reasons, not the least of which is that more Muslims

have died from al-Qaeda's violence than they have from Crusaders and Zionists.

Al-Qaeda is not Nazi Germany under Hitler or communist Russia under Stalin. We do not need to panic or overreact. We don't need to torture people and set up secret prisons. We can defeat this organization and protect our constitutional liberties.

This war, like almost all wars, will inevitably consume the president running it. Wars consume presidencies. Both George Bush and Lyndon Johnson learned that. President Obama will have to put the effort in to not only developing the right strategy, but to persuading both the American people and our allies that we should continue this war and we can win it.

ABOUT CIGI

The Centre for International Governance Innovation is an independent, nonpartisan think tank that addresses international governance challenges. Led by a group of experienced practitioners and distinguished academics, CIGI supports research, forms networks, advances policy debate, builds capacity, and generates ideas for multilateral governance improvements. Conducting an active agenda of research, events, and publications, CIGI's interdisciplinary work includes collaboration with policy, business and academic communities around the world.

CIGI conducts in-depth research and engages experts and partners worldwide from its extensive networks to craft policy proposals and recommendations that promote change in international public policy. Current research interests focus on international economic and financial governance both for the long-term and in the wake of the 2008-2009 financial crisis; the role of the G20 and the newly emerging powers in the evolution of global diplomacy; Africa and climate change, and other issues related to food and human security.

CIGI was founded in 2001 by Jim Balsillie, co-CEO of RIM (Research In Motion), and collaborates with and gratefully acknowledges support from a number of strategic partners, in particular the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario. CIGI gratefully acknowledges the contribution of the Government of Canada to its endowment Fund.

Le CIGI a été fondé en 2001 par Jim Balsillie, co-chef de la direction de RIM (Research In Motion). Il collabore avec de nombreux partenaires stratégiques et exprime sa reconnaissance du soutien reçu de ceux-ci, notamment de l'appui reçu du gouvernement du Canada et de celui du gouvernement de l'Ontario. Le CIGI exprime sa reconnaissance envers le gouvernement du Canada pour sa contribution à son Fonds de dotation.

