

Obama's New "Af-Pak" Strategy: Can "Clear, Hold, Build, Transfer" Work?

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SUMMARY

On entering the White House, US President Barack Obama aimed to put the war in Afghanistan at the forefront of his security agenda following eight years of neglect by a Bush administration preoccupied by the war in Iraq. The Obama administration spent nearly a year reviewing the situation in Afghanistan and vetting war options amid protracted interagency deliberation and partisan debate. By the end of 2009, President Obama affirmed his administration's commitment to degrading the capabilities of terrorist groups ensconced in Afghanistan and Pakistan and announced that, by the end of July 2011, the US would begin a conditions-based transfer of responsibility to the Afghan government and security forces, enabling the United States to diminish its kinetic military activities in favour of a more "typical" presence with Washington continuing to providing development and economic assistance, plus training for military and civilian personnel. Thus the counter-insurgency mantra of "clear, hold and build" became, under Obama, "clear, hold, build and transfer." This paper evaluates the viability of the "clear, hold, build and transfer" approach in light of the structural challenges to each element and the pressure to deliver results in a short time-frame amid difficult security conditions.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Despite eight years of engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Bush administration (2000–2008) did not conduct an interagency assessment to develop a regional strategy for stabilizing Afghanistan and securing greater cooperation from Pakistan on a range of activities. With regard to the objectives for Pakistan, these include ceasing support for and even acting against the Afghan Taliban and groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba as well as enhancing Pakistan’s will and capability to contend with the Pakistani Taliban, which Pakistan recognizes as a direct threat. This chronic neglect was due in large measure to the invasion of Iraq, which dominated the interagency process. Because the Bush administration considered both Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) to be part of the “Global War on Terror,” the US National Security Council (NSC) dealt with Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan within the same portfolio. This meant that “in any given hour at the NSC, 55 minutes would be spent on Iraq and the remainder on Afghanistan and maybe Pakistan.”¹ In 2008, the US Government Accounting Office (US GAO) decried this appalling lack of strategy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan in light of the severe degradation of security in both countries (US GAO, 2008). Finally, toward the end of the summer of 2008 and after

¹ Various interviews with officers on the Joint Staff and NSC throughout the summer in May and June 2008.

considerable criticism, the Bush administration conducted a net assessment of the Pakistan and Afghanistan theatres (Pakistan Policy Working Group, 2008).

President Obama hired Bruce Riedel (a former CIA officer) to review US policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan within three weeks of assuming office. Riedel assembled a team that included General (Ret.) James L. Jones, Obama’s national security advisor; representatives from the Departments of Defense and State and the CIA; a senior official from the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Vice-President Biden’s national security adviser, Antony Blinken. The working group also included Lt. Gen. Douglas E. Lute, who led President George W. Bush’s team on Iraq and whom the Obama administration retained to help manage Afghanistan war policy for the NSC. General David Petraeus and the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard C. Holbrooke, also attended the group’s meetings. The White House wanted a complete report by mid-March, in advance of a NATO summit in early April 2009, which would address, among other issues, NATO’s renewed commitment to Afghanistan (Chandrasekaran, 2009). The resulting document laid out five clear objectives for Afghanistan and Pakistan that were described as “realistic and achievable” and squarely “vital to U.S. national security” (The White House, 2009a). Although this was an improvement from the Bush Administration’s failure to articulate goals for either country, the claims that these objectives were vital or achievable were and are subject to debate.

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The ambitious goals for Afghanistan included degrading the capabilities of international terrorist groups to launch attacks from Afghanistan; promoting an effective Afghan government that could serve its citizens (especially the provision of internal security with minimal international support); and developing an increasingly self-reliant Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) that can take the lead in both counterterrorist activities (for example, against al-Qaeda) and counter-insurgency efforts (against the Taliban and other anti-government elements). With respect to Pakistan, enhancing civilian control, advancing a stable constitutional government and promoting economic development to provide opportunities for Pakistanis were identified as key goals. Finally, the White Paper called for involving the international community in the achievement of the lofty goals for both states, with a vital role for the United Nations (The White House, 2009a). Unfortunately, the document did not lay out a clear path to achieving these sweeping objectives in Afghanistan and there was very little mention of an actionable plan for Pakistan. The document focused on the what and why but neglected the how.

General Stanley McChrystal, the then newly appointed commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, translated the objectives of this White Paper into a military strategy, which was obtained and leaked by *The Washington Post* in August of 2009. In his *Commander's Initial Assessment*, General McChrystal laid out the joint problem clearly:

The ISAF mission faces two principal threats and is subject to the influence of external actors. The first of which is the existence of organized and determined insurgent groups working to expel international forces, separate the Afghan people from GIRoA [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan] institutions, and gain control of the population.

The second threat...is the crisis of popular confidence that springs from the weakness of GIRoA, the unpunished abuse of power by corrupt officials and power-brokers, a widespread sense of political disenfranchisement and a longstanding lack of economic opportunity. ISAF efforts have further compounded these problems. These factors generate recruits for the insurgent groups, elevate local conflicts and

power-broker disputes to a national level, degrade the people's security and quality of life, and undermine international will. (McChrystal, 2009: 13)

While most of the commentary and policy discussion focused upon one aspect of this strategy—the call for some 40,000 additional troops—commentators overwhelmingly ignored the second major aspect of his plan: the need for an accountable Afghan partner in Kabul. In the same month that the report was released, President Hamid Karzai secured his re-election through pervasive electoral fraud, which eventually resulted in the Independent Election Commission calling for a runoff election between Karzai and his chief rival, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah. Dr. Abdullah withdrew, arguing that the government did not address the fundamental conditions that led to a rigged election in the first instance. Karzai assumed a second elected term as president under a veil of corruption. If the international community had any hope that Karzai could lead the charge against corruption, the 2008 electoral fiasco dispelled that illusion. Perhaps because the US and its international partners had and have few means of coercing better governance from Kabul despite billions of dollars of development and other assistance,² policy makers and analysts alike focused on the singular lever that Washington and its partners could control: scaling up or down the numbers of troops and altering their mission (see Fair, 2009; Manikas, 2009). Adding to the clamour for more troops was the media campaign that General McChrystal waged, which provoked clashes with his civilian chain of command (Spillius, 2009).

In the wake of McChrystal's assessment and under political pressure from the Republican opposition to augment the forces in Afghanistan with more US troops, Obama again undertook an interagency policy review of the conduct of the war thus far to weigh McChrystal's public calls for more troops. Obama was patient in his review, for which he received substantial criticism (for example, see Thompson, 2009). After a period of intense deliberation, on December 1, 2009, Obama announced a revised "Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan" at West Point (The White House, 2009b). In that speech, President Obama

² At the time that General McChrystal released this report, amid widespread cries of corruption within the Afghan government and the programming initiatives of the US Agency for International Development, the US government was undertaking a review of how the United States disperses assistance and the US Congress was deliberating what sort of metrics should be imposed to gauge success. During the summer of 2009, a joint civil-military plan was released that focused on combining military and civilian efforts (see McChrystal, 2009).

reaffirmed the core goal of disrupting, dismantling and eventually defeating al-Qaeda and preventing its return to either Afghanistan or Pakistan (where they have, in fact, never actually left). This in turn requires denying al-Qaeda safe havens in both Afghanistan and Pakistan and reversing Taliban gains since 2002. The December 2009 strategy dramatically departed from the March 2009 vision in that it scaled back substantially the agenda of state building in Afghanistan and mandated an intense focus on the Ministries of Interior and Defense.

To achieve these more modest goals, Obama articulated a three-pronged strategy. First, the US will “pursue a military strategy that will break the Taliban’s momentum and increase Afghanistan’s capacity over the next 18 months” (The White House, 2009b). The additional 30,000 troops are envisioned to secure key population centres as a part of a new population-centred counterinsurgency approach advanced by General McChrystal. They will also provide improved capacity to train competent Afghan security forces to permit a conditions-based, phased transfer of responsibility to the Afghans beginning in 2011. Although McChrystal asked for 40,000 additional troops, Obama called for US allies to contribute the balance. Unfortunately, many key allies have since announced their withdrawal including the Dutch from Oruzgan and the Canadians from Kandahar. This is extremely unfortunate, as both countries, along with the US and Britain, were among the few that were willing to engage in actual combat without burdensome caveats, as noted below. Second, Obama emphasized the US need to work with its partners, the United Nations and the Afghan people “to pursue a more effective civilian strategy, so that the government can take advantage of improved security” (The White House, 2009b). In the wake of President Karzai’s fraudulent election and increasing criticism at home and abroad of his corrupt government, Obama was clear that “the days of providing a blank check are over.... We expect those who are ineffective or corrupt to be held accountable.” Third, Obama announced that “we will act with the full recognition that our success in Afghanistan is inextricably linked to our partnership with Pakistan” (The White House, 2009b).

In addition to the three pillars identified by Obama, the US State Department issued its *Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy* on January 21, 2010, to advance the president’s al-Qaeda-focused goals (US Department of State, 2010). That plan, in significant measure, reintroduces some of the expansive state-

building goals of the March 2009 strategy, but it does so by emphasizing a civilian surge, focusing on key districts in the south and east (consistent with the locations of the newly inserted troops), and on sub-national venues such as the provincial and district governments. As a part of this plan, the United States agreed to support a “reintegration” plan that uses financial allurements to draw Taliban fighters and low- and mid-level commanders away from the insurgency. As with the previous policy documents, this document too identified Pakistan as a key partner and, like the March and December 2009 road maps before it, the US State Department plan provided no clear strategy for Pakistan.

In short, the end state of Obama’s policy toward Afghanistan is the transfer of responsibility to Afghans, enabling the US to diminish its kinetic military activities and establish a more typical presence through which Washington would provide development and economic assistance as well as continued training of military and civilian personnel. Thus, the counter-insurgency mantra of “clear, hold and build,” has become under Obama “clear, hold, build and transfer.” Drawing from the above discussion, there are several interrelated activities that will enable Obama’s desired end state. First, the US with international and Afghan partners must reverse the Taliban’s momentum through an expanded international troop presence, the introduction of an explicitly population-focused counter-insurgency strategy, and the creation of increasingly effective Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

Second, the Afghan government must be able to govern. This is critical. Once an area has been cleared of insurgents, adequate security forces (preferably Afghan) are needed to hold the territory to prevent insurgents from returning and regaining a hold on the territory, and the Afghan government must step in to rebuild the area and establish the writ of the law. To date, the military has sought to provide these civilian skills. The Obama administration believes that this transformation will require a civilian surge and has pursued one.

Clearly, building governance capacity is a long-term endeavour that may or may not bear fruit over any policy-relevant timeframe—if ever. The requirement to show success on the battle field is immediate, however. In the recent offensive, Operation Moshtarak, undertaken in Marjah in Helmand province in February 2010, NATO worked with the Afghan government to hand-pick several officials from the various line ministries for service in the

local administration and selected a new district governor who recently returned from Germany. General McChrystal has dubbed this a “government in a box.” The government in the box has its critics, especially since the new district governor, Abdul Zahir, served part of jail sentence that exceeded four years for attempting to stab his own 18-year-old son in 1998. This is hardly an inspiring start to civilian governance (Reichman and Grieshaber, 2010). Third, the Taliban are local (unlike al-Qaeda in Iraq, which was foreign) and are, as Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said, a part of the political fabric of Afghanistan (see Bumiller, 2010). With the civilian and military leadership of the belief that the US and its allies “can’t kill their way out of Afghanistan,” the Obama administration is actively supporting a policy of “reintegrating” the Taliban,³ while remaining sceptical and even opposed to President Karzai’s own plan for “reconciling” with the Taliban, which some Afghans perceive as “deal making.”⁴

This essay evaluates the viability of each of these elements in turn. In the final section, I conclude with a discussion of the obvious: that the various elements of the so-called “Af-Pak” strategy decisively lacks credible means of drawing Pakistan into the efforts to pacify Afghanistan. This lacunae is as puzzling as it is evident. Senior military and civilian leaders understand the need. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, opined in September 2008 that the United States cannot discuss Afghanistan without “speaking of Pakistan” and added that he plans “to commission a new, more comprehensive strategy for the region, one that covers both sides of the border” (see CNN, 2008). To date, no such comprehensive strategy is in place.

REVERSING THE TALIBAN MOMENTUM?

There are essentially two fundamental elements of the new US military strategy in Afghanistan. The first is a population-centric counterinsurgency (COIN) approach that prioritizes the protection of the population rather than killing the adversary. In other words, sometimes it is better to take no action against an enemy combatant than it is to engage, especially if civilians are at risk.

3 Richard Holbrooke, US special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, explained his rationale by noting that “you cannot kill everyone.” (see Holbrooke, 2002). See also footnote 23.

4 Comments that Fauzia Kofi (an Afghan parliamentarian) made in Brussels at the March 2010 German Marshall Fund, Brussels Forum on March 27, 2010.

Despite having been engaged in various COIN endeavours (including Vietnam), the US military, until recently, did not have a COIN manual; rather, it drew from its various COIN efforts the conclusion that COIN should be avoided. After many years in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US army finally issued its first-ever field manual on counterinsurgency (*US Army Field Manual 3-24/ Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5*) (FM 3-24) in 2007 (see US Army and Marine Corps, 2007). This approach is evident in the Marjah offensives in central Helmand that commenced in February 2009 (see Filkins, 2009).

The field manual recommends anywhere between 20 to 25 counter-insurgents for every 1,000 residents in an Area of Operations (AOR) (US Army and Marine Corps, 2007: 23). With a population of 23 million (est. 2009), this would translate into a total of 460,000 to 575,000 counter-insurgent forces in Afghanistan.⁵ Needless to say, this is a force requirement that is far in excess of any possible international deployment; however, arguably, the insurgency has not systematically affected the entire country. With the introduction of the additional 30,000 troops, the US COIN efforts will focus on key provinces in the NATO/ISAF Regional Command South⁶ (est. population of 3 million) and the most troubled provinces of Regional Command East⁷ (est. population of 6.4 million). Focusing on these populations, FM 3-24 suggests a more modest total counter-insurgent force of 188,000 to 235,000 (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2010b).

The current international troop presence, as of February 1, 2010, is 86,000, with 45,100 in Regional Command South and 24,900 in Regional Command East (ISAF, 2010). (In addition, there are 6,300 in Regional Command Capital, 5,895 in Regional Command North and 4,600 in Regional Command West). These numbers are clearly far below the prescribed force levels per the guidance of FM 3-24 even for just regional commands south and east. In reality, the numbers are even more deficient because of “national caveats” placed by many European countries that seriously restrict their forces from engaging in offensive operations against the enemy.⁸ For example, the Germans in Regional Command North cannot engage in combat unless in self-

5 Population information derived from the CIA World Fact Book (2010).

6 Composed of Day Kundi, Helmand, Kandahar, Nimruz, Uruzgan and Zabul.

7 Ghazni, Kapisa, Khost, Kunar, Laghman, Logar, Nangarhar, Maydan Wardak, Nuristan, Paktiya, Paktika, Parwan. Excludes Bamiyan and Panjshir.

8 See discussion on national caveats in Morelli and Belkin (2009).

defence. Thus the Talibs tend not to engage them to avoid fire fights (Koelbl and Szandar, 2008). This underscores the need for the ANSF to augment the international forces. Over time, and beginning in the summer of 2011 should the conditions prove conducive, the ANSF should take complete responsibility for security.⁹ Unfortunately, there has been no public information on what these conditions are.

Figure 1: ISAF Regional Commands and Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Locations



Source: NATO (2009).

The current strategy is not to fully conduct COIN as tactically dictated by FM3-24, if for no other reason than it is simply impossible with the available resources. With the additional 30,000 US troops and a currently undetermined, small increment of international troops, the new “population-centric” COIN strategy will focus on protecting ten population centres that would stop short of an all-out assault on the Taliban while establishing conditions for longer-term security in Kabul, Kandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kunduz, Herat, Jalalabad and a few other clusters of villages. In addition, military planners will seek to protect important agricultural areas that are under Taliban pressure, such as the Helmand River valley, as well as key lines of control such as the Ring Road. At the

⁹ President Obama’s identification of the 2011 target for a “pull out” has been misconstrued in the media. The transfer of Afghan security responsibility will take place in phases on a district-by-district level as units prove confident. Moreover, declaring a timeline may encourage combatants to hold on until the withdraw commences; but declaring a timeline also puts the Afghan government on notice that it must step up and become more effective, as the international forces cannot sustain their presence indefinitely for fiscal and political reasons.

same time, military forces would maintain pressure on the insurgents in more remote areas by relying on surveillance drones and Special Operations Forces, who may be able to identify pockets of Taliban and guide aerial attacks (Shanker, Baker and Cooper, 2009). Since taking charge as Commander ISAF, General McChrystal has issued orders to use excessive care in minimizing civilian casualties as a part of his approach of emphasizing the protection of populations over killing enemies.¹⁰ To this end, he has also brought most of the US Special Operations Forces under his direct control for the first time. He has reportedly done so out of concern for civilian casualties and to reduce potential for disorder in the field (Opiel and Nordland, 2010).

The operations executed by “pro-government forces” (PGFs, including international and Afghan security forces) have nonetheless resulted in a growing number of civilian casualties since 2007, even though the PGFs are responsible for a declining portion of those casualties due to concerted mitigation efforts. In fact, in 2009, the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) recorded the highest number of civilian casualties (2,412) since the most recent conflict began in 2001. PGFs were responsible for only 25 percent, however, in contrast to the 67 percent committed by the anti-government forces (UNAMA, 2010). This is an enormous improvement over the previous year: in 2009, PGFs were responsible for 41 percent of the 2,118 civilian casualties compared to 46 percent for anti-government forces (AGFs) (UNAMA, 2010).

Incidentally, the importance of population protection approaches is not lost on the Taliban. In July 2009, Mullah Omar issued a new code of conduct, titled “The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan Rules for Mujahedeen,” with 13 chapters and 67 articles, for distribution to Taliban forces. Mirroring Gen. McChrystal’s directive, it called on Taliban fighters to win over the civilian population and avoid civilian casualties. The document also included guidance to limit the use of suicide attacks to important targets and set forth guidelines for abductions (Al Jazeera, 2009). Only the 2010 civilian casualty figures will demonstrate whether these guidelines are effective. The Taliban have first-mover advantage in the war of information, however, and can declare without consequence any figure with no regard to its veracity. In contrast, NATO/ISAF cannot report quickly on events because it has to investigate and

¹⁰ For example, in the February 2010 Marjah Operation Moshtakil, McChrystal prohibited the use of the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System after its use resulted in civilian casualties (see CBS News World, 2010).

verify data before issuing statements. Thus, the actual numbers of civilian, AGF and PGF forces may matter less than the figure insurgents can introduce into the public domain. Although President Karzai decries the civilian casualties attributable to PGF, he has been less vociferous about Taliban-inflicted casualties, – a continual irritant among the coalition forces providing his government with the security it requires, as is Karzai’s frequent use of the moniker “my Muslim brothers” for the Taliban.

Critical questions remain, of course, about the ultimate viability of a strategy that focuses on securing key lines of control and urban areas when the Taliban derive their legitimacy from sub-district, rural areas. Needless to say, this was a strategy pursued by the Soviets in their unsuccessful bid to defeat the mujahedeen; however, there are significant differences between the current and Soviet campaigns. The international forces operating in Afghanistan are professional, volunteer armies rather than the demoralized Soviet conscript army. The former has far superior technology on the battlefield, such as communications, surveillance, precision-guided munitions, unmanned aerial vehicles, mine-resistant ground vehicles and air assets with advanced avionics, among others. Finally, although Afghan tolerance for the international presence is declining, Afghans are not nearly as hostile, on the whole, to the current NATO/ISAF presence as they were to the Soviets (due in part to the latter’s policies of collective punishment, raping and pillaging, and scorched earth tactics), and few Afghans actually support the Taliban (if polls are a trustworthy measure).¹¹

A second key element to this military strategy, which will enable the international military forces to withdraw sooner than later, is the continual effort to build up the ANSF composed of the Afghan National Army (ANA),

Afghan National Air Corps and the various elements of the Afghan National Police (ANP) forces (such as the uniformed police, border police and civil order police). Throughout much of the summer and winter of 2009, US military planners aimed to expand the ANSF to a strength of 400,000. Currently, the ANA has a purported strength of 100,130 personnel and the ANP somewhere near 80,000 (ISAF, 2010). Those numbers probably exaggerate significantly the actual strength of either force. International officials interviewed by this author in August 2009 concur that perhaps as many as 25,000 police are “ghost police,” persons who are being paid for policing duties but who may not actually exist (police commanders overstate staff numbers to pilfer excess salaries). Both the ANA and ANP personnel are prone to taking a variety of unauthorized leaves, and corruption affects the entire gamut of recruiting, retaining, compensating and training the forces.

There have been successes, however, since 2002. The ANA is one of the most respected institutions in Afghanistan and is developing adequate operational capabilities and effectiveness. AWOL (absent without leave) figures have declined. In May 2009, the AWOL rate was 9.1 percent, which is still high, but represents an enormous improvement over previous years when it was as high as 40 percent (US DoD, 2009; CIGI, 2009). DoD officials report that December 2009 was a boon month for ANA recruiting due to increased pay, shorter enlistment contracts, hazard pay and other inducements. Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell, head of the Afghan training mission, reported that in the first seven days of December more than 2,695 recruits signed up, compared to 831 in September (Flaherty, 2009).

Enormous challenges remain, however. Some 90 percent of ANA recruits are illiterate, compared to the national illiteracy rate of 75 percent. This means that illiterate and non-numerate ANA personnel are, at best, challenged by logistics (such as maintenance and supply of weapons, munitions, spare parts, etc.), cannot read maps (much less use geo-positioning systems), cannot read manuals for new, much less complex weapons (for example, newly introduced US M-4 rifles to replace AK47s) or even record AGF license plates. Analysts often underestimate the impacts of illiteracy and lack of numeracy among “trigger pullers.” In fact, the fundamental dearth of human capital in Afghanistan generally and the ANSF in particular is proving an enormous challenge. These problems are compounded further for the ANP, who are expected to file incident reports, track licence places, compile evidence

11 Polls in Afghanistan are extremely dubious, and therefore any figure for a given year should not be taken as reflecting an accurate trend. Under heroic assumption about measurement error, social desirability and other factors being relatively constant over the various years surveyed, one may make crude inferences about trends over time. Afghans were asked “Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the presence of the following groups in Afghanistan today?” In 2009, relative to 2006, strong support for US forces generally decreased and strong opposition increased. Similar trends are seen in support for and opposition to NATO/ISAF forces in the same period. In contrast, support for foreign “jihadi” fighters increased slightly and opposition declined slightly; strong support for the Taliban remained constant while strong opposition declined. (In most cases, respondents shifted to “somewhat support” or “somewhat oppose,” suggesting increasing ambivalence rather than strong opinions. The survey was conducted for ABC News, the BBC and ARD by the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR) based in Kabul. Interviews were conducted in person, in Dari or Pashto, among a random national sample of 1,534 Afghan adults from December 11-23, 2009. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/11_01_10_afghanpoll.pdf. ABC and BBC have commissioned such polls regularly since 2004, although in many cases, the questions have changed over the years, making direct comparisons for all years on all variables impossible.

and other tasks that require ANP personnel to read, write and perform basic math (see CBS News World, 2009).

Moreover, there are simple and elementary problems with numbers. With respect to building the ANA, securing re-enlistments remains a challenge as does attrition due to death, disability and desertions. The turnover rate within the ANA is 25 percent; however, DoD derivation of this figure is confusing and inconsistent over time.¹² Thomas Johnson and Chris Mason report that when one does the simple calculations of recruits in and recruits out, at steady state, the ANA will be hard-pressed to sustain a force of 100,000 much less the larger numbers hoped for (Johnson and Mason, 2009).

Irrespective of the actual numbers of recruits that come into the ANA and the ANP and the ever-more-aggressive production goals and expedited timelines, inadequacy of training for these recruits limits the fill-rate. ISAF and US officials concede that there is a paucity of trainers for both the ANA and ANP. The fill-rate for ANP mentors may be as low as one in three.¹³ Trainers for the ANA are more adequate, reflecting the consistently higher priority of building the ANA relative to the ANP. Whereas 3,314 persons are needed for the ANA Embedded Training Teams (ETTs), of which the US has fielded 1,655 and NATO countries 799, a shortage of 849 persons remains for a fill-rate of 75 percent. This number permits 52 ETTs, also known as Operational Mentoring and Liaisons Teams (OMLT). DoD officials have conceded that the paucity of trainers has resulted in trainee-to-trainer ratios that are too large to be effective. Not only is the quantity of trainers a problem, so is the quality, especially for the ANP, which has been largely mentored by DynCorp contractors, whose performance has been suboptimal (CIGI, 2009).

With respect to the ANP, training approaches have been inconsistent since 2002 and contested among the international donors. The US and some others have advocated police training that will result in a paramilitary institution, reflecting the realities that police are needed for COIN, that they are most exposed and vulnerable to AGF offensives and least trained and equipped. Some

Europeans, however, have argued for a community policing model, which is needed over the long-term. This is an artificial binary: Afghanistan needs both. The realization is, in some measure, reflected in the Government of Afghanistan's communiqué for the January 2010 London conference. This document calls for accelerated Focused District Development (FDD) and the creation of an Afghan Gendarmerie Force to inter-operate with the ANA (see Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2010). Police training has consistently received less attention and fewer resources than the ANA. The Germans were the lead nation in this area after the Bonn Conference in 2002; however, they focused on training relatively small numbers of officers at the rehabilitated Police Academy while doing very little to train the rank and file (Giustozzi, 2008).

The US State Department stepped in with various ad hoc attempts to retrain the existing police rank and file. The goals were modest and aimed to provide elementary policing skills such as crowd control during election-related activities. The US employed the American private security firm DynCorp to perform the training. The training went forward with little institutional resistance in most places, with the exception of Herat province, which was under the sway of Ismail Khan (the "warlord" of the area), who refused to cooperate. This "quick-fix" approach yielded very few fixes and was not necessarily quick. While other troop-contributing countries have been uncomfortable with the American approach, they were unable to develop and resource alternative plans. In the absence of a widely accepted, scalable police-training program, various countries engaged in bilateral training of ANP, with different doctrines and approaches. They also supplied various equipment platforms that were obsolete at worst or, at best, contributed to a multitude of systems that rendered logistics (such as maintenance and resupply) a heroic task. As such, these ad hoc approaches produced ANP cadres of varying—mostly low—quality and competence (see Fair and Jones, 2009; ICG, 2007; ICG, 2008; Wilder, 2007).

The current approach to building and training the ANP is the US-led FDD program. Launched in late 2007, the US initiative has relatively broad backing by the international donor community if for no other reason than donors have been able to offer no alternative. FDD was conceptualized to contend with police corruption at the district level. Once a district has been selected (based upon military priorities), all ANP are pulled out for eight weeks of training. (Clearly this is inadequate to deal with corruption, ineptitude, illiteracy and so forth.) They

¹² The media spokesperson for the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A, the lead training entity) noted that US command abruptly changed what it included in its overall strength figures for the Afghan army in late September 2008: "The way numbers were reported was switched from reporting only operational forces to including all soldiers, officers and civilians, regardless of training status and command" (Porter, 2009).

¹³ Author conversations with CSTC-A and NATO in March 2009 and August 2009.

are replaced by the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), a national police force that is not tied to local corrupt officials, criminal syndicates or AGFs. District residents have been so pleased with the ANCOP under the auspices of the program that they have asked that it replace their local police permanently. In theory, once trained, the ANP are supposed to be mentored for at least two months. In practice this does not happen. Moreover, FDD does not impart policing skills, rather paramilitary training reflecting current—not future—operational requirements (see Fair and Jones, 2009; CIGI, 2009; Cordesman, 2009; US DoD, 2009).

Unfortunately, FDD does not require the Afghan government to deal with the corruption in the first instance by removing corrupt officials (including district governors, among others). Recidivism is high, and only one district has been retrained to deal with this issue. Given the paucity of police mentors, FDD is moving slowly, touching only 55 districts of eight provinces by the fall of 2009 (Afghanistan has 34 provinces and nearly 400 districts) (Fair and Jones, 2009; Cordesman, 2009).¹⁴ According to officials at the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (the lead training entity, which has subsequently been largely subsumed under the newly-formed NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan), the program could complete training in all districts by 2014 if it received the resources it needs. This is, of course, unlikely to happen given the meagre international commitment to this effort. Moreover, given the past success of FDD, recidivism, failure to deal with corruption at the political level (the underlying problem with the police) and near-exclusive focus on paramilitary training at the expense of police training, the resultant police force is unlikely to be appropriate for the future domestic security needs of Afghanistan.

If by some slim chance adequate trainers became available for ANA and ANP training (something that may be possible due to the US troop surge), the problems with FDD were resolved and recruitment, retention and attrition gaps were addressed, the Afghan Government would still be unable to pay even the recurring costs of its current ANSF. President Karzai anticipates that the West will have to pay for the ANSF's recurring annual costs of some US\$10 billion for at least two decades (see Sarhaddi Nelson, 2009). As

international troops withdraw, it remains to be seen whether or not partner parliaments, much less the US congress, will be willing to continue paying these bills given that opposition to the Afghan efforts is deepening among the public of contributing countries.

To contend with these sustained systemic problems in producing ANSF of adequate quality and numbers, the US has promoted a series of militia programs palatably titled, “Community Defense Initiatives.” Although Department of Defense officials loathe the use of the word “militias” to describe these and have introduced neologisms in both Dari and Pashto for the awkward phrase, Afghans do use the word “militia” in Dari and are dismissive of the rebranding efforts. US defence officials, outlining their vision, explain that these community defence forces (or militias in Afghan parlance) are extensions of the ANP, controlled by the government of Afghanistan, and will disband when the ANP become competent. They claim that training—but not weapons—will be provided to those communities that have formed “militias” to counter the Taliban. The DoD justifies this approach on multiple grounds. First, the DoD contends that there is an urgent need to secure the population in the face of inadequate national or international security forces. Second, they argue (with little actual understanding of Afghan institutions) that tribes and other local institutions are legitimate providers of order and justice. Finally, they contend that the Taliban have co-opted tribes, sub-tribes and clans, and thus the coalition forces have missed an important opportunity to compete with the Taliban.¹⁵ That the DoD wishes to pursue this route in light of past controversial (if not failed) militia efforts is indeed puzzling. The most recent such effort is the now defunct Afghan Public Protection Force, established in Wardak in March 2009.¹⁶

During the author's interviews with DoD and ISAF officials, they tend to dismiss critics who are concerned that that this approach undermines eight years of efforts at disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) (Gossman, 2009), countering that DDR in insurgency-riven areas makes little sense even if they concede that this short-term “solution” may have adverse consequences in the long-term. Second, they dismiss opponents of the

15 From extensive meetings about the first prototype program rolled out in Wardak. See discussion in Fair and Jones (2009). This is also based on conversations with NATO/ISAF, US Embassy staff and DoD officials in Afghanistan (Kabul, Asadabad, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kunduz, Herat, Jalalabad) in May 2008, March and August 2009 and in Washington DC in November and December 2009 and January 2010.

16 For a description of the program, see Radin (2009). For a balanced discussion, see Perito (2009).

14 The actual number of districts is not yet determined. This figure of 400 districts is taken from US Agency for International Development/Office of Transition Initiatives (2009).

program who are concerned that the effort will be disastrous if the success of these militias rest upon being extensions of the ANP and are held to account by the government of Afghanistan. Neither the ANP nor the government has an established, reputable track record that would inspire such confidence. Finally, they seem unconcerned that Afghans themselves are not enthusiastic about militias and, all else equal, would prefer that resources be dedicated to building competent police.¹⁷

Finally, the new US plan continues to focus on the Ministries of Defence and Interior and current—as well as past approaches—have dedicated insufficient attention to the development of the wider rule of law system. This has been notable with respect to training the Afghan police force which has primarily been shaped as a paramilitary force rather than a policing institution. The above-noted FDD program does not address this either. In the eight-week course, there are approximately 263 hours of training. Only 28 of those hours are devoted collectively to ethics, the constitution, the penal code, the criminal procedure code and human rights. Most of the training is devoted to imbuing the police with the skills to survive engagement with insurgents and other illegally armed groups. The FDD training course has paid scant attention to core policing activities such as criminal investigation (US DoD, 2009).

Since the 2006 forging of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and the Afghanistan Compact, the efforts of the Afghan government and the international community have been reordered “to consolidate peace and stability through just, democratic processes and institutions, and to reduce poverty and achieve prosperity through broad based and equitable economic growth” (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2006). The compact laid out three major pillars of vertically integrated activities: security; governance, rule of law, and human rights; and economic and social development. The compact also identified several areas that were supposed to be “cross-cutting,” such as counter-narcotics, regional cooperation, anti-corruption, the environment and gender equity. In practice, however, these activities remained deeply stove-piped. This has created enduring problems with respect to developing a

functional rule of law system. Although police training has been ongoing despite its problematic focus and constrained resources, there has been remarkably little effort to contend with corruption across the Ministry of Interior or other ministries involved in alleged criminal activities (such as the Ministry of Counter Narcotics, among others), and there has been virtually no investment in the Ministry of Justice. District courts remain poorly staffed (if staff come to work at all), lack basic resources (such as copies of laws and basic office supplies), lack protection and are vulnerable to coercion. Adequate detention and prison facilities that meet the most basic international standards are also absent in most Afghan jurisdictions. Even if the police are able to arrest someone and collect and secure some custody of evidence, there are few detention centers to which they may be remanded and few functioning courts where their cases may be adjudicated. Without focusing upon the Ministry of Justice at the national, provincial and district levels, reforms in the rule of law sector will result merely in building another security force (see extensive discussion in Fair and Jones, 2009).

SURGING CIVILIAN CAPACITY?

While the addition of more troops has received considerable publicity, an important and innovative complement to the Obama strategy is the so-called “civilian surge” (see DeYoung, 2009a). Obama understood the need for a surge in civilian capacity even as a candidate. In July 2008, he said: “We cannot continue to rely only on our military in order to achieve the national security objectives that we’ve set. We’ve got to have a civilian national security force that’s just as powerful, just as strong, just as well funded” (cited in Metz, 2009).

While President Bush’s administration paid scant regard to the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, it did implement a civilian surge to Iraq to complement the military surge there and more than doubled the number of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). The civilians deployed to Iraq possessed specialized expertise such as economic development, agronomy, communications and rule of law and could provide military counterparts with necessary technical expertise in these areas. These civilians were embedded with the military within the PRTs. Admittedly, the State Department faced numerous challenges filling the civilian slots, and high-ranking State Department officials conceded in 2007 that the department was pushing reluctant officers out to Iraq.

¹⁷ Author interviews in Kabul, Jalalabad, Kunduz and Herat in August 2009 with a variety of human rights, electoral and international analysts. The afore-noted ABC/BBC/ARD poll—with all of the previously noted caveats—demonstrates less confidence that militias can provide security and indicates they have less support than even the Afghan police. (Commanders and their militias have more support than the Taliban or drug smugglers, however.) See survey conducted for ABC News, the BBC and ARD by the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR).

Many of these so-called civilian billets were filled with military reservists or civilian contractors, who were typically paid more than government counterparts and often had dubious productivity.¹⁸ In May 2008, there were at least 800 civilians in Iraq working through the PRT system and in other capacities (Ries, 2008).

After his election, Obama retained Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense. Like Obama, Gates believes that “one of the most important lessons of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is that military success is not sufficient to win.” Rather, victory requires

economic development, institution-building and the rule of law, promoting internal reconciliation, good governance, providing basic services to the people, training and equipping indigenous military and police forces, strategic communications, and more—these, along with security, are essential ingredients for long-term success ... The Department of Defense has taken on many of these burdens that might have been assumed by civilian agencies in the past ... But it is no replacement for the real thing—civilian involvement and expertise. (Robert Gates, quoted in Metz, 2009)

The military is looking forward to civilians taking a greater—if not the lead—role in state-building in Afghanistan. They have long opined that the US needs an expanded civilian capability for such efforts, noting that, in the absence of such a civilian capability, the military has had to take on these tasks. There is a numerical reality that foists the US military as the public face of US diplomacy. The American Foreign Service Association in an October 2007 bulletin explained that the US active-duty military is 119 times larger than the Foreign Service. The total uniformed military (active and reserve) is 217 times larger. A typical US Army division is larger than the entire Foreign Service (American Foreign Service Association, 2007).

Richard Holbrooke explained in November 2009 that he expected some 974 civilians to be deployed to Afghanistan by early 2010. Given the diminutive size of the US Foreign Service the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (part of the State Department and lacks its own separate foreign service), the bulk of these civilians are likely to be contractors. (Their deployment was significantly delayed by the Haitian earthquake relief effort, which occupied significant resources and attention). If executed, this would be an unprecedented civilian effort in Afghanistan (Carmichael, 2009). This civilian capability is an essential element of McChrystal’s *Commander’s Initial Assessment* as further adumbrated in the *U.S. Government Integrated Civilian–Military Campaign Plan for Support to Afghanistan*. This plan draws from guidance from both the US Embassy in Kabul and the commander of US Forces in Afghanistan and is purported to be a collaborative US interagency product drafted in close consultation with ISAF, UNAMA and other partner nations (US Government, 2009).

That document laid out a series of guiding principles that included the importance of assisting the Afghan government to assume a more effective leadership role; directing resources to the sub-national level “where the insurgency draws strength through coercion and exploiting people’s dissatisfaction with their government;” fostering unity of effort across all civilian and military components; nurturing closer collaboration with international partners; promoting visible and measurable effects; and increasing accountability and transparency within the Afghan government, the United States and other major donor partners in disbursing assistance (US Government, 2009). Reflective of US security interests, the plan identified the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar, the heart of the insurgency, as the central priority, with the eastern region (for example, Nuristan, Kunar, Nangahar) as a second priority area. The plan argues that “securing the most unstable provinces will have a cascading impact on the rest of the country” (US Government, 2009). The document also lays out “eleven key counter-insurgency transformative effects” (US Government, 2009). US efforts will be focused at community, provincial and national levels to achieve these affects. At each level, civilian–military teams will assess and prioritize the so-called transformative effects.¹⁹ This is the first serious move away from the long-

¹⁸ Author conversations with State Department officials, 2007. Author fieldwork in Iraq visiting seven PRTs in October 2008.

¹⁹ These effects included population security; elections and continuity of governance; expansion of accountable and transparent governance; taking the information initiative; access to justice; action against irreconcilables, creating sustainable jobs, agricultural opportunity and market access; countering the nexus of criminality, corruption,

standing model of US engagement focusing on the central government in Kabul toward a more serious focus on sub-national forms of governance.

To achieve these objectives, greater numbers of civilians would have to be deployed to Afghanistan to engage military counterparts. When Obama took over the White House in January 2009, there were only 320 civilians deployed by the United States in Afghanistan, of whom only 67 served outside of Kabul. In contrast, 388 persons from the “civilian surge” will be deployed in the provinces. The administration seeks teachers, engineers, lawyers and agricultural specialists (Carmichael, 2009). The latter are critical both because the country had been agriculturally self-sustaining in the past and because providing an alternative to the poppy will be key to diminishing its production in the country, which is the world’s largest supplier of opiates (UNODC, 2009). By the fall of 2009, however, recruitment of civilians for Afghanistan was going slowly, owing to a general paucity of civilian capacity availability and because of individuals’ concern for their personal safety. Once civilians are emplaced, their mobility may be further restricted by adverse security conditions, thereby diminishing their operational effectiveness (Northam, 2009). Nonetheless, State Department officials claim that this early turbulence has been sorted out and that several hundred civilians have already been deployed and that nearly 1000 civilians would be on the ground by “early 2010” (US Department of State, 2010). Department of State officials have indicated that these civilians are now in place even though there were some delays due to the earthquake in Haiti. The integrated civilian–military plan recognized that in the conduct of the war to date, not only has the military been the dominant actor, but in many cases the military simply does not have a comparably ranked civilian leader with whom to liaise and ensure unity of purpose. The plan laid out “civ-mil integrating instructions.” To address the paucity of civilian leads to serve as counterparts to the military at all levels, the plan lays out two key civilian initiatives. The first is the establishment of a Civilian Lead Position at both Regional Commands South and East and at each sub-regional US-led Brigade Taskforce in each province. These Civilian Leads are to operate with the authority of the Chief of Mission at their level and subordinate levels, execute US policy and guidance, and serve as the civilian counterpart to the military commander at each level. These Civilian

Leads should also be able to coordinate US civilians with the military forces operating at that level to advance “unity of effort” (US Government, 2009). In February 2010, Frank Ruggiero was appointed the Senior Civilian Representative to Regional Command South and Dawn Liberi has been so appointed for Regional Command East. The second civilian initiative is the deployment of additional US government civilians throughout Afghanistan in the capital, Regional Command East and South at new civilian regional hubs, at selected US Brigade Taskforces, selected PRTs and selected US battalions (US Government, 2009).

While the US has attempted to bring civilians and military elements under US command into alignment, ISAF too is trying to bring about greater civilian–military cooperation. With the departure of Ambassador Fernando Gentilini (who served as NATO’s fourth Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan from May 2008 to January 2010), Ambassador Mark Sedwill assumed this post on February 7. Sedwill understands the need to “build a genuinely joint and new kind of campaign headquarters here at the ISAF headquarters and that’s what we intend to do working together as a complete team” (see NATO, 2010).

Given the recent vintage of this structure, an empirical assessment of its efficacy is beyond the purview of this essay. At first blush, it appears well calibrated to bring greater numbers of civilians to Afghanistan and to vest them in moving the model of assistance from one that is “project based” toward one that pursues “integrated stability operations on a regional and provincial level with unified civilian-military planning and action across and between governments.”²⁰ Second, and equally important, it focuses resources on the sub-national level, calling for the dedication of attention and resources to the district and even sub-district levels, where the insurgents are most active and from where they enjoy greater operational space and control.

There are a number of structural factors that have not been satisfactorily resolved, however. First is the nature and background of the civilian surge. What I observed in Iraq was that the civilian surge often brought persons to theatre who had only nominally appropriate backgrounds but who were motivated by the lucrative terms of employment. Many were civilian US government

narcotics and insurgency; government and community-led reintegration; and border access for commerce, not insurgents (US Government, 2009: 3).

20 Comments of Dawn Liberi, the senior civilian representative to Regional Command East, explaining the new civilian approach (cited in Grunstein, 2010).

contractors and, as such, were not permanent US federal employees. This meant that their performance was not in alignment with institutional equities, where individuals would suffer consequences for poor performance or be rewarded for superb service. State Department officials have explained that the Obama administration is aware of the flaws of the Iraq civilian surge and does not intend to repeat them. They maintain that the US Mission reserves the right to send civilians back to the United States if their skills or performance are not appropriate, and they claim that this has already happened.²¹ If these unverified claims hold true, it is possible that the Obama White House may be more successful in its civilian surge in Afghanistan.

Second, until now, staffing and human competence at the provincial level has been scant (as noted above). It remains to be seen whether or not the proposed civilian surge will be large enough to enable and sustain a sub-national focus, assuming that the individuals are recruited per plan and deployed.

The Obama administration has focused new resources on pre-deployment civilian and military training of persons deploying to Afghanistan to better facilitate a unity of effort between and within civilian and military efforts. In July 2009, a new program was established to iron out civilian–military cultural problems before they occur in theatre. This training facility has been established at a National Guard facility (Camp Atterbury, near Indianapolis, Indiana), where active-duty units do pre-Afghanistan deployment training. At the training, civilians learn to engage with Afghan and US military counterparts using scripted vignettes. They learn to distinguish between a “captain and a colonel” and how to “climb in and out of armoured Humvees, reacting to village bombings and interacting with Afghans” (De Young, 2009). Such familiarization with the military is critical because the military provides the security and movement for civilians working in Afghanistan.

Third, despite having eight years of ground experience in Afghanistan, the US military and intelligence community lacks critical language skills, is overly dependent on translators (whose interests may not be in alignment with the United States) and has experienced difficulty retaining expertise in theatre over the duration of the conflict. At long last, to overcome these and other challenges, the

Department of Defense set up the Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands Program (AFPAK Hands), designed to develop cadres of officers and civilians from each of the military’s services who agree to three-to-five-year tours to the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. This program aims to build a dedicated cadre of some 600 officers and civilians, who will develop skills in counter-insurgency, regional languages and culture, and then be “placed in positions of strategic influence to ensure progress towards achieving US government objectives in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region” (US Marine Corps, 2009). It is a competitive program, and persons who are selected are required to spend a year in Afghanistan before moving to the Pentagon’s new Afghanistan office or to jobs at the US Central Command (CENTCOM) that are focused on the war. The program commenced on October 19, 2009.

AFPAK Hands is complemented by a related effort: the new intelligence centre based at CENTCOM called the “Afghanistan-Pakistan Intelligence Center of Excellence.” The Pentagon has also established a Pakistan-Afghanistan Coordination Cell, with about 400 officers and senior enlisted personnel devoted to Afghanistan and Pakistan, to develop personnel with extensive counter-insurgency experience and knowledge of Afghanistan’s culture and power structures (Dreazen, 2009). The Joint Staff also established a video-conference facility, called the Pakistan-Afghanistan Federation Forum, which brings together academics and policy scholars, civilians and military personnel from think tanks and universities, key government agencies (Departments of State and Defense, National Security Council, Embassies in Kabul and Islamabad) and key US military headquarters (CENTCOM, SOCOM and ISAF, among others). This meeting is held via videoconference on a weekly basis, with a large group participating at the headquarters in the Pentagon.²²

Apart from concerns about the quantity and quality of the US civilian surge, there is also the reality that the US does not control the battle space in Afghanistan. For this reason, US planning documents stress that it can only pertain to US civilians working under the direction of the US mission in Kabul. With most US troops operating under ISAF control for operations, ISAF is a critical partner at every level below the US government national plan. As such, the Integrated Civilian–Military Campaign Plan cannot replace existing command and control relationships for

²¹ Author conversation with State Department officials, 2010.

²² This author is a regular attendee.

US military elements, but are rather a “means by which commanders and civilian leads can effectively unify their effort” (US Government, 2009: 29). What this means in practice is not obvious.

REINTEGRATION WITHOUT RECONCILIATION?

Perhaps the most controversial and least articulated element of the US strategy to transfer sovereignty responsibility to Afghanistan is the “reintegration” effort, which comes out of the US civilian and military leadership’s position that the United States cannot “kill its way out of Afghanistan.” US officials are clear that this “reintegration” effort is not tantamount to “reconciliation” and focuses on providing financial incentives (such as job training and education) to low- and mid-ranking Taliban commanders and foot soldiers. The State Department’s January 2010 regional strategy document explains that that effort will “reach out to communities, individuals and groups, coordinate protection, amnesty, and support (such as employment) to those who reintegrate and disarm, and support monitoring and de-radicalization mechanisms” (US Department of State, 2010: 14). This is in contrast to the Karzai government’s more robust process of reconciliation. (Because President Karzai has yet to fully exposit the details of his proposed national reconciliation effort, it is difficult to see how both the reintegration and reconciliation efforts will interact.)

There are some immediate concerns surrounding this initiative. First, the assumption that undergirds this program is that the rank and file and even low- and mid-level commanders fighting for and with the Taliban do so for non-ideological reasons. Richard Holbrooke, the US special envoy, has defended the rationale for reintegration by arguing that the people they aim to reintegrate are foot soldiers and some low- and mid-level commanders and are not ideological leaders.²³ On another occasion he claimed that

“the overwhelming majority of these people are not ideological supporters of Mullah Omar [the fugitive Taliban leader]

²³ Richard Holbrooke, in explaining the rationale for reintegration, said “...the people out there we are talking [Taliban foot soldiers and some low and mid-level commanders] about are not the ideological leaders. And isn’t it a lot better to invite them off the battlefield through a program of jobs, land, integration than it is to have to try to kill every one of them? McChrystal himself said over the weekend he’ll never be able to do that.” See Holbrooke (2009).

and al-Qaida...Based on interviews with prisoners, returnees, experts, there must be at least 70 percent of these people who are not fighting for anything to do with those causes.” (quoted in Katz, 2010)

It is far from obvious, however, that such interlocutors would be amenable to conceding ideological motivations over more quotidian and less noxious motives such as the paucity of economic opportunities. At the most basic level, the assumption that most fight for pecuniary rather than ideological reasons (be it Islamism or opposition to foreign occupation) may be ill-founded. At best it will be a testable hypothesis.

A second concern is the US claim that its reintegration efforts depend upon political leadership in Kabul, which prefers a policy of reconciliation over reintegration. The former implies a political process and negotiation, and Washington has clashed with Kabul and other partners over this issue. For example, the US rejected Karzai’s proposal (first made in November 2009) to invite Taliban leadership—including Mullah Omar—to a national “Loya Jirga” or “Grand Council” meeting aimed at achieving a peace agreement (Porter, 2010). In late January 2010, Kai Eide, the outgoing UN Special Representative, called on Afghan officials to seek the removal of some senior Taliban leaders from the United Nations’ list of terrorists as a first step toward opening direct negotiations with the insurgent group (Filkins, 2010). Holbrooke evidenced some willingness to do so with low-ranking members, but he was unwilling to entertain easing up on the leaders of the insurgency (such as, Mullah Omar or Gulbuddin Hekmatyar) and claimed that he “can’t imagine what would justify such an action at this time...and I don’t know anyone who is suggesting that” (Filkins, 2010).

Mr. Eide, for his part, expressed concern that reintegration although it may be useful, may be inadequate. Eide said, “I don’t believe it’s as simple as saying that these are people who are unemployed, and if we find them employment they will go our way...Reintegration by itself is not enough” (Filkins, 2010). He also expressed concern that “while some rank-and-file Taliban may fight for economic reasons... the motives of most were more complex. The Taliban’s leaders exert more control over the foot soldiers than they are given credit for” (Filkins, 2010).

These concerns are in addition to the myriad of problems associated with, among other issues, how potential

candidates would be vetted, how their “reintegration” would be verified, how their status would be monitored and whether or not the job training would yield useful employment. A structural problem also exists; even if foot soldiers and some low- and mid-level commanders are not motivated by financial reasons, they have built up several years of social capital as “Taliban.” Their networks of fighting cadres provide them security, a way to obtain status that the tribal structure may not confer and access to illegitimate means of income (drugs, protection rackets, collection of “taxes” and the like). Any reintegration program must provide comparable social capital and a face-saving means by which they could leave the fight (see discussion in Christia and Semple, 2009).

The discord over “reintegration” versus “reconciliation” between Washington and Kabul probably reflects greater strategic divergence between the two. The Americans understand “reintegration” to follow successful clearing (military operation), commencing during the holding and building phases. US military officials have explained to this author that the US military surge is intended to reverse the momentum of the Taliban— to deliver decisive defeats to shift the cost–benefit calculus of foot soldiers and low- and mid-level commanders such that they would become amenable to reintegration without a meaningful process of reconciliation.²⁴ It is too early to assess whether or not this has happened on any significant scale; rather Department of Defense personnel have told this author that so far this has not materialized. However, in March 2010, the offensive has been ongoing since February. If this program were to materialize, it would surely take longer than this window of time.

In addition, it is not clear who in Afghanistan wants reconciliation and who wants reintegration. Many Afghans were appalled and dismayed when the US recuperated and rehabilitated old Afghan warlords from the “civil war” period in late 2001 and early 2002. Afghan human rights groups (including women’s rights groups) fear that any political accommodation with the Taliban will translate into losses in hard-earned gains with respect to human rights. Afghans have reason to worry. In late 2009 or early 2010, Afghanistan suddenly implemented a controversial law that had been shelved for nearly two years after it was passed by a slender parliamentary majority in 2007 (it is not clear exactly when and how the law came into

force.). The law gives immunity from prosecution to those Taliban who have killed and maimed provided that they lay down their weapons. The law came into force in advance of the January 2010 London Conference on Afghanistan during which President Karzai announced his plans for reconciliation and the international community agreed to support reintegration efforts financially. Some Afghans fear, with justification, that the law was brought into force to facilitate President Karzai’s push for a “quick peace deal with insurgents.” The law also gives immunity from prosecution to all of the country’s warlords, the former factional leaders, many of whom are loathed by broad swathes of Afghans because of the atrocities they perpetrated during Afghanistan’s civil war in the 1990s (see Boone, 2010).

CONCLUSION: PUTTING PAKISTAN INTO THE AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN “STRATEGY”

Most analysts of South Asia understand that Pakistan’s positive involvement in Afghanistan is necessary to stabilize Afghanistan. In some ways, decisions taken in Rawalpindi (where the Pakistan army is headquartered) may over-determine the ultimate course of events in Afghanistan. Indeed, the available evidence suggests that Pakistan retains its goal of cultivating a client state through proxies such as the Taliban. Pakistan hopes that, in the future, Afghanistan will limit Indian influence, accept the Durand Line as the de jure border, cease making irredentist claims on Pashtun-dominated territories in Pakistan, and desist from instigating Pashtun mobilization for greater autonomy or even independence from the Pakistani state. Although Pakistan figures in the various so-called Af-Pak strategies, however, the actual treatment of Pakistan in those documents is scant and superficial.

Several issues befuddle US policy-makers. First, the US leadership believes that Pakistan has owned its war on terrorism by increasing its commitment to defeat the so-called Pakistani Taliban (Tehreek-e-Taliban-Pakistan). While the Pakistani Taliban share some overlapping networks with the Afghan Taliban (such as the Haqqani network), the Pakistani Taliban is inherently Pakistan-focused. There have been episodic clashes between Mullah Omar and the Pakistani Taliban leadership because the latter continues to attack Pakistani military, paramilitary and intelligence agencies, which have been the Afghan Taliban’s patrons and critical supporters.

²⁴ Author discussions with US Department of Defense officials in November and December 2009 and January and February 2010.

The US is poignantly aware, however, that Pakistan is unlikely to abandon the Taliban. Recent arrests of key Taliban leaders such as Mullah Barader probably have more to do with Pakistan's vexation that he, and some of the other Quetta shura members, were seeking independent negotiation channels with President Karzai, reportedly to split the Taliban and co-opt moderates (CBS News World, 2010). Nor is Pakistan likely to ever abandon—much less eliminate—key proxies such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad that aim to operate in India.

The US is wary of pushing Pakistan given that Pakistan continues to serve as the primary supply route supporting military operations in Afghanistan. The so-called Northern Route has limited capacity, enormous costs and is vulnerable to the vicissitudes of Russia, a country wary of US influence in its own backyard and of NATO's anti-Russia ambitions (Branigin, 2010). With US troops emplaced in Afghanistan, supporting the war-fighters will dominate US military and possibly even domestic interests. Ironically, although Pakistan, with its history of supporting terrorism from the safety of its nuclear umbrella and the presence of al-Qaeda and Taliban sanctuaries, presents a far greater risk to US national security interests than Afghanistan, it has become a secondary or even residual theatre. The only tool in the US toolbox to contend with the sanctuaries enjoyed by al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban are drone strikes. The United States, under President Bush, struck a bargain with then President Musharraf that it could conduct drone strikes launched from Pakistan. US drone strikes were limited to Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), however, and politicians and military leadership condemned the strikes as a violation of sovereignty for domestic audiences (Scarborough, 2008).

A number of vexing realities stem from Washington's inability to extract better cooperation from Pakistan in exchange for the more than US\$17 billion in US aid and lucrative defence reimbursements (under the Coalition Support Funds Program) it has received since 9/11.²⁵ First, because the United States has been unable to persuade Pakistan to cease all support for the Afghan Taliban, Washington and Kabul believe that Afghanistan needs a 400,000-strong ANSF to enable Afghanistan

to defend itself against internal threats and external aggression. Arguably such a force structure would not be necessary if Washington could compel Islamabad to renounce support for the Afghan Taliban. Second, with the military and civilian surge, the increased US footprint in Afghanistan alone will be at least 60,000 to 80,000 more persons (inclusive of civilian security and other contractors needed to support the surge). This means that the surge has decreased US ability to put pressure on Pakistan to renounce ties to the Taliban, because Washington needs Pakistan even more to support the surge. US officials conceded that the surge decision was made without adequate contingency planning with respect to alternative logistics routes in part because they do not believe there are options. Apparently, "stockpiling" was not considered, and working through Iran (even through partner states or private sector entities) was excluded without consideration.²⁶

As Pakistan becomes more important to US war-fighting needs, Pakistan will be in a better position to extract concessions from Washington, not the other way around. Pakistan is likely to successfully argue for an important role in Taliban reconciliation; indeed, the probable end state will ex post facto justify Pakistan's position all along that it needs to retain ties to the Taliban to secure its long-term interests, necessitated by geography and proximity.

A consistent problem undergirding all of the Obama administration's efforts to forge an effective regional strategy is the admitted lack of a strategy toward Pakistan that offers anything remotely new or even desired by the Pakistanis. During her visit to Pakistan, for example, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton offered Pakistan an "expanded strategic partnership" (The Daily Times, 2009). Yet Pakistan seems to have no interest in embracing a strategic relationship with Washington—far from it. Pakistan is holding up hundreds of visas for new embassy and consular personnel who are needed to execute the expanded aid program authorized by the Kerry-Lugar-Berman legislation, which offers Pakistan some US\$1.5 billion each year for civilian assistance for five years, in addition to unspecified security assistance. When offered a "Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)," the *sine qua non* indicator of strategic importance of a US ally, Pakistan leaked the terms to anti-US hawks in the media, who whipped up a frenzied storm of baseless

²⁵ Between FY2002 and FY2010, Pakistan has received US\$11.4 billion in military assistance and lucrative reimbursements and US\$6 billion in economic-related aid. Direct Overt US Aid and Military Reimbursements to Pakistan, FY2002-FY2011, Prepared for the Congressional Research Service by K. Alan Kronstadt, specialist in South Asian Affairs, March 9, 2010.

²⁶ Conversations with US State and Defense Department officials in November and December 2009 and January 2010.

accusations. A similar approach was orchestrated by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to create a public backlash against the conditionalities of security assistance of the Kerry-Lugar-Berman legislation, despite the fact that the legislation offered nothing new.

The reality remains, however, that Pakistan needs the US as much as the converse. Washington provides needed economic and military assistance, which will become ever more important as India continues its ascent. Although Pakistan often bluffs that China will provide for Pakistan should Washington fail to do so, China is unlikely to provide Pakistan with the platforms that will enable it to sustain a defensive conventional capability against India in the future. Moreover, China too is wary of Pakistan's internal instability, notably Pakistan's continued support for Islamist militants with possible implications for China's restive Uighurs, and Pakistan's contributions to insecurity in Afghanistan where China has important investments (such as the copper mine in Logar).

Understanding that there are limits to US national power, I argue that Pakistan not Afghanistan should constitute the focus of US regional planning rather than being a residual or even logistical problem to be worked out to support US interests in Afghanistan. The US needs a strategy with respect to Pakistan and it needs one now.

Lineaments of such a new policy must first recognize that the United States does have considerable leverage over Pakistan. US fears that Pakistan will cut off the supply line are likely fanciful. The principal reason why more trucks have not been sabotaged as they pass through Chaman into Kandahar or from Torkham into Bagram is that the Taliban, various Pashtun trucking mafias, and the Pakistan military are lucratively compensated in this logistical supply chain. It stands to reason that any cessation would be limited. The US will never develop the political courage to deal forthrightly with Pakistan until it recognizes its actual leverage over the state.

Second, the US needs to actively engage in contingency planning to anticipate Pakistani actions as it seeks to employ greater coercive power such as delaying payments, supporting conventional strategic platforms that are not needed for counterinsurgency operations, and moving to enforce the conditions upon security assistance enshrined in the Kerry-Lugar-Berman legislation. This law states conditions for arms transfers for fiscal years 2012 through 2014 upon certification by the Secretary of State that Pakistan

continues to cooperate with the United States in efforts to dismantle supplier networks relating to the acquisition of nuclear weapons-related materials, ... [demonstrates] a sustained commitment to and is making significant efforts towards combating terrorist groups, ... [is] ceasing support, including by any elements within the Pakistan military or its intelligence agency, to extremist and terrorist groups, ... [is] preventing al-Qaeda, the Taliban and associated terrorist groups, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, from operating in the territory of Pakistan, ..., closing terrorist camps in the... FATA, dismantling terrorist bases of operations in other parts of the country, ... [is] strengthening counterterrorism and anti-money laundering laws; and [that] the security forces of Pakistan are not materially and substantially subverting the political or judicial processes of Pakistan. (Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act, 2009)

Unfortunately, like every other piece of legislation addressing Pakistan's contribution to insecurity, this legislation too provides the option of a waiver that may be exercised by the US Secretary of State should he or she determine that doing so is "important to the national security interests of the United States" (Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act, 2009). If the past is any predictor of the future, it is likely that these stringent conditions will be waived, as Washington is unlikely to antagonize the Pakistan army as long as it believes the army is needed to secure short-term US objectives.

While the US needs to get serious about negative inducements, it also needs to seriously consider a real strategic relationship with Pakistan that focuses upon political rather than financial or military carrots. Such a political inducement should aim to influence Pakistan's purported sense of insecurity. Elsewhere I have argued that one potential option is a rigorously conditions-based nuclear deal that is contingent on Pakistan's cessation of terrorism under the nuclear umbrella and transparency about nuclear proliferation networks. Even if Pakistan fails to meet the criteria in full, any incremental progress would be a positive development; moreover, such a deal could potentially alleviate fundamental Pakistani suspicion that the US seeks to destroy Pakistan's strategic assets. By

removing this fundamental distrust through such a deal, the US could also consider a security guarantee, although strictly negotiated with India (Fair, 2010). Should Pakistan refuse such offers, Washington could conclude that Pakistan's professions of fundamental insecurity against India are—and have been—merely a rent-seeking tactic to secure assistance from Washington.

At the same time, Washington must pursue a regional solution. Washington's failure to find some tactical *modus vivendi* with Iran on supply networks and other issues inherent to Afghanistan is incomprehensible. By any metric, Pakistan has a longer track record of supporting terrorists as well as nuclear weapons' proliferation violations both horizontally and vertically. Despite these peccadilloes, Washington has managed to funnel more than US\$17 billion to Islamabad while being unable to develop any working relationship with Iran. This is unfortunate: Iran was extremely constructive during the Bonn process in December 2002, only to be rewarded by being corralled in the group of "Axis of Evil" states along with Iraq and North Korea.

Washington must also engage more closely with China on South Asian security. China's investments in Central Asia as well as in Pakistan and Afghanistan mean that China has a growing stake in the region's security; yet China and the United States do not engage in sustained dialogue on regional security.

Finally, there is the India conundrum. The current administration has linked Pakistan's Afghan policy to the ongoing dispute with India over the territorial disposition of Kashmir and the six-decade-old security competition. Proponents of this vision argue that Afghanistan can be settled by settling the Kashmir dispute (see Rubin and Rashid, 2008). This is a contentious argument. The Pakistan army would be unlikely to permit any resolution from fructifying, as the "Indian threat" is its primary justification for dominating the state and its resources. Moreover, even if this argument were true, after decades of Pakistan-supported terrorism, India and its citizenry are adamant that they will not reward Pakistan for its interference in Kashmir. If India were to finally resolve the dispute with Kashmiris under its administration, however, the Pakistani public would find the army's justification for running—and ruining—the state increasingly less acceptable. Unfortunately, just as the US has no Pakistan policy, India also lacks such a vision about what kind of neighbour it wants to live next to and what sort of

policies are likely to bring about that future. Thus the US and India should collaborate closely on both Pakistan and Afghanistan while making it clear to all that Washington needs relations with all three states.

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Le CIGI a été fondé en 2002 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.

