

US Combat against the Afghanistan Insurgency: President Obama's Approach

Nadav Kedem and Shmuel Zatliff-Tzur

Following the September 11 terror attacks in the United States, then-President George W. Bush ordered a US military ground invasion of Afghanistan to rout al-Qaeda, which was supported by the Taliban government. After eight years of a US policy in Afghanistan designed by the Bush administration, President Obama chose to implement a different policy. Under Obama's leadership, a decision was made to substantially beef up US forces in Afghanistan, and significant resources were invested in building the Afghan state and its security forces.

Obama's main goals were to defeat al-Qaeda; strike a hard blow against the Taliban, which had become much stronger and was threatening Afghanistan's stability; and help the Afghani government consolidate a governmental and security infrastructure in the country. President Obama indicated that the summer of 2011 would be the date for withdrawing most US forces from Afghanistan. However, after a situation assessment it was announced at a NATO summit in Lisbon in November 2010 that the military withdrawal from Afghanistan and the transfer of security responsibility to the Afghans would take place only in late 2014. Following a subsequent situation assessment in early 2012, US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced that the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and the transfer of security responsibility to the Afghans would be moved up to 2013, about a year ahead of schedule.¹

Nadav Kedem is a Neubauer research associate at INSS. Shmuel Zatliff-Tzur is an intern at INSS.

The United States viewed Pakistan as an essential partner to achieving its goals in Afghanistan in the war on terror. However, this cooperation has had ups and downs over the years. The US has strongly criticized Islamabad for providing refuge for Taliban activists and their affiliates, who operate from Pakistan against Western forces in Afghanistan, without Pakistani opposition. For its part, Pakistan claims that US aerial attacks are blatant violations of Pakistani sovereignty and arouse public opposition to US policy, which is considered fundamentally anti-Islamic. Yet in spite of the differences of opinion, the two countries need each other. The US needs Pakistan for dealing with the insurgent organizations that find shelter in the tribal areas, and Pakistan needs US economic and military aid, which it gets in return for cooperating with the US.

The purpose of this article is to offer an interim assessment of the Obama administration's policy in Afghanistan ahead of the planned withdrawal, against the backdrop of US domestic policy considerations in advance of the November 2012 presidential elections and the triangular relations between the United States, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The article will present US goals in Afghanistan as outlined by President Obama and will assess the prospects for their successful achievement before the withdrawal.

A New US Strategy for Afghanistan

Under President Bush, US combat in Afghanistan focused on pursuit of al-Qaeda by US commando forces and regular army forces and removal of the Taliban regime from government. In the first years of the fighting, the Americans scored significant achievements, including the fall of the Taliban regime and its flight, along with al-Qaeda, to the mountainous areas of Pakistan. However, once the Bush administration's attention was diverted from Afghanistan to Iraq, the Taliban and al-Qaeda managed to resurrect their military and human infrastructure in Afghanistan and Pakistan. At the same time, the new Afghani government, headed by Hamid Karzai, has not succeeded in implementing stable governance throughout the country, and the Taliban and its affiliates, who resumed operations against Western forces in Afghanistan, entered the vacuum.

In January 2009 the new Obama administration inherited this problematic legacy, with the Taliban already operating from bases in Pakistan – which sheltered them from NATO operations – and beginning

to control large areas of Afghanistan. The organization established shadow governments that controlled the southern provinces of Afghanistan, principally Helmand and Kandahar, which served as bases for recruiting and beefing up manpower, and also as traditional spiritual centers that supported Taliban ideology. Al-Qaeda's military apparatus was placed under Taliban command, and together they carried out terror attacks and guerilla operations against Western forces in Afghanistan. Another local player with power and military capabilities that joined in the anti-Western actions was the Haqqani network, which had extensive ties with the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The network is spread out over a wide area that includes parts of eastern Afghanistan and western Pakistan, and carries out showcase guerilla and terrorist attacks in order to become a major player in any future political agreement. The renewed terrorist activity sparked fear that the Afghani Taliban would once again take control of the government, provide refuge for al-Qaeda, and allow an infrastructure for terror attacks outside of Afghanistan. For this reason, President Obama viewed fortification and stabilization of the central government in Afghanistan as the principal challenge in preventing terrorist elements in the country from threatening US national security.²

Underscoring the need for a policy shift, Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense in 2009 in the Obama administration, claimed that President Bush's strategy in Afghanistan was not effective because troops there were too few and spread too thin. He warned that failure in Afghanistan would be a major setback for the US administration's ability to fight terror; it could embolden insurgents, as it did when they ousted the Soviets from the country, and thus a new US strategy was needed for the region.³

Three alternatives were proposed for US policy that focused on counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy, which includes beefing up fighting forces and at the same time establishing effective government and security institutions. As part of this strategy, there was an attempt not only to confront terrorism but also to rebuild the failed state that had served as a fertile ground for the growth of terror. The COIN strategy aspires to achieve legitimacy from the local populace and win over hearts and minds, and in so doing, help dry up the sources of support for terror. It was hoped that the promotion of personal safety, good governance, the rule of law, and infrastructure building, a higher standard of living, and

similar improvements would win the West the sympathy and support of the population.

Vice President Joe Biden feared that expanding the war would lead to Afghani alienation and dependence on foreign aid. He therefore proposed that US efforts be focused on building the Afghan state, and that most of the fighting force be withdrawn within eighteen months. In contrast, General Stanley McChrystal, commander of US forces in Afghanistan, claimed that the weakness of Afghani security forces made it necessary for the United States to bear the burden of the war. He therefore demanded that the fighting force be beefed up significantly, without committing to a target date for completing the mission. Robert Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton proposed an intermediate approach of pushing the Afghan government to take responsibility for the country, with the United States and NATO bearing the burden of the fighting. They proposed a smaller increase in forces than McChrystal suggested and a declared end date.

Ultimately, it was decided to add 30,000 US troops in an attempt to defeat the militants, including in areas that until then had not been under the control of Western forces. At the same time, it was decided to build and train an Afghani force that would be capable of confronting terrorism, and significant resources were invested in massive development of a civilian infrastructure in Afghanistan for the benefit of the country's citizens. Obama hoped in fact to cultivate Afghanistan's local ability to confront insurgents, in order to enable the US army's gradual withdrawal and the transfer of security responsibility to the Afghanis. In addition, an understanding developed that success in the battle in Afghanistan would require cooperation with Pakistan in order to act against the Pakistani Taliban, which was operating against the Pakistani government and providing support for fighters in the Afghani Taliban.⁴

US Measures for the New Approach in Afghanistan

According to a Congressional report, the United States saw economic aid to Afghanistan as the key factor in promoting stability in the country and winning the hearts and minds of the populace. This, in fact, was the basis of the COIN strategy. The purpose of the aid is to create the conditions necessary for developing a stable democratic government that is capable of coping with the militants on its own. During Obama's

tenure, there has been a significant increase in the economic investment directed at developing Afghanistan's security and civilian apparatuses. As a result, the educational system has improved, enrollment in schools has increased, and there has been a significant turn for the better in the healthcare system. Nevertheless, the report warns that the lack of supervision and incorrect allocation of resources are likely to make it difficult for the local government to monitor aid and prevent corruption.⁵

Much effort was also invested in developing the capabilities of the Afghani army and police, which number some 320,000 personnel, in order to prepare them to confront the insurgents independently.⁶ However, rampant corruption and the ethnic diversity of the troops (among other issues) call into question their future loyalty to the state. In addition, in light of the economic difficulties that NATO countries and the United States in particular are facing, the cash flow for maintaining Afghani security forces will be reduced over time, which is likely to harm their ability to assume security responsibility for the country.⁷

As of January 2012, the number of Western and foreign troops in Afghanistan was about 130,000, with some 90,000 of them American. Figure 1 presents the number of US forces in Afghanistan from 2002 until early 2012, with the increase in the number of troops after President Obama took office clearly evident.

There were three main types of operational tactics employed by the United States in an attempt to defeat the insurgents during the fighting in Afghanistan: extensive ground operations, pinpoint commando actions, and use of unmanned aerial vehicles to strike terrorists hiding in Pakistan.

Most of the ground operations in Afghanistan have focused on Taliban strongholds in the Helmand and Kandahar southern provinces and in the eastern provinces located near the mountainous areas of Pakistan. One of the main problems with wide-ranging ground operations against Taliban outposts is that after a military action, troops would leave the area. The Taliban would then conquer the area again, which dragged NATO forces into new battles over areas they had already cleansed. In order to address this problem, it was decided that Afghani police and government forces would advance in the wake of the troops in order to take control of the area after the conclusion of the military act. However, even after this plan was implemented in various places, the Taliban succeeded in returning to action and threatening the local residents.⁸

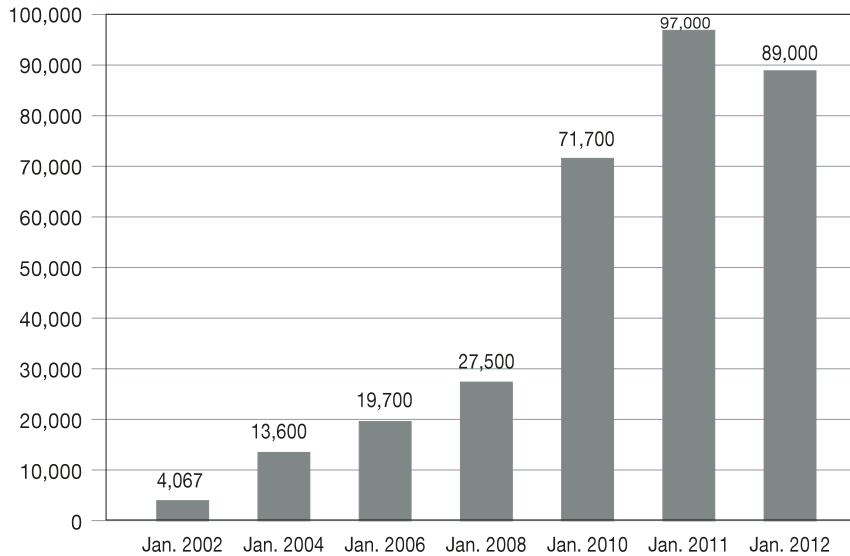


Figure 1. US Troops Deployed in Afghanistan, 2002–12

Source: Livingston and O’Hanlon, “Afghanistan Index,” p. 4.

Another military tool was nighttime commando raids on residential complexes suspected of hiding terrorists and weapons. During 2010, there was a significant increase in the number of night raids. According to US officers, thousands of armed men were killed and arrested during these raids, which, they claim, shows how critical they are (table 1). Nevertheless, the night raids are a source of tension between Afghanistan and the United States because innocent civilians are frequent casualties. Afghanistan’s President demanded that the United States stop them, declaring that if they continued, he would not sign a strategic agreement with the West.⁹

Table 1. Insurgent Casualties during Special Forces Operations in Afghanistan, 2010-11

	2010		2011	
	Killed	Arrested	Killed	Arrested
Leaders	~235		~1,500	
Fighters	~1,066	~1,673	~3,200	~8,000

Source: Livingston and O’Hanlon, “Afghanistan Index,” p. 10.

A main tool for fighting terrorist organizations in their hiding places in Pakistan is the extensive use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The number of attacks grew significantly under the Obama administration, with some 240 carried out between 2009 and 2012. These attacks dealt significant blows to al-Qaeda: its leadership has been weakened, and its ability to carry out attacks in the region has been greatly reduced (table 2).¹⁰ The deaths of twenty-four Pakistani soldiers from US fire on November 26, 2011 sparked major tension between Pakistan and the United States and brought about a two-month halt in the aerial attacks. US and Pakistani officials claim that this break was exploited by the militants to rebuild and reinforce the connections between them in order to coordinate the effort against Western forces.¹¹ On January 10, 2012, the aerial attacks against the insurgents in Pakistan were resumed, and as of late March 2012, eleven attacks of this kind had been carried out.¹²

Table 2. Insurgent Deaths as a Result of Aerial Attacks in Pakistan, 2009-12

	2009	2010	2011	2012
Leaders	~16	~18	~13	~4 ¹³
Fighters	~447	~783	~392	~73

Source: Roggio and Mayer, "Charting the Data for U.S. Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004-2012"

In June 2011, President Obama declared that the United States had succeeded in achieving the goals adopted with the decision to add forces in Afghanistan: addressing the al-Qaeda challenge, impeding Taliban momentum, and training Afghani security forces.¹⁴ Indeed, with the number of terror attacks falling by 9 percent, a NATO spokesman in Afghanistan called 2011 a "remarkably successful year" in the fight against the insurgents. He claimed that the militants had lost their hold on territories in the south and east of the country, near the border with Pakistan.¹⁵ Ostensibly, this is significant success, yet the situation on the ground may indicate a different trend.

The Taliban Response to the US Strategy

NATO officers have declared that the Taliban is not capable of holding on to territory, but in actuality, control of the ground is not necessarily

the most important factor for influencing the populace. In order to avoid direct encounters with NATO forces, the Taliban has changed its strategy of operation, opening a psychological front once it transferred the fighting to cities so that NATO would lose its aerial advantage; it has executed targeted killings of senior Afghan figures; waged showcase terrorist attacks; and damaged civilian infrastructures, such as blowing up cellular antennas. The goal is to show the population that the Taliban is alive and kicking and that the government was not capable of protecting its citizens.¹⁶

According to a UN report, 3,021 civilians were killed in Afghanistan in 2011. This is an 8 percent increase over 2010, and the fifth year in a row in which the number has risen. In 2011, 431 people were killed in suicide attacks, an 80 percent increase over 2010. In 2011, 77 percent of all conflict-related deaths of civilians were attributed to “anti-government elements,” including the Taliban. In 2011 there was also a significant increase in the number of incidents aimed directly at politicians, senior military figures and police, and civilians suspected of collaborating with Western forces. The most blatant example was the assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani, head of the High Peace Council, who was killed at his home by a suicide bomber in September 2011.¹⁷ The report concludes that Afghanistan is becoming dangerous for the average citizen.¹⁸

For the insurgents, carrying out complex terrorist attacks was another way to demonstrate their capabilities. These attacks were generally aimed at government symbols and included suicide attacks followed by a concentrated assault on the target by a number of teams in an attempt to hole up there. In order to be able to fight for a protracted period, the terrorists would carry with them large quantities of weapons and food. One of the most prominent attacks was on the US embassy in Kabul in September 2011. Terrorists took control of a multi-story building near the embassy and fired rockets at the embassy building. Only after some twenty hours of fighting did security forces manage to gain control of the building and kill the terrorists.¹⁹

Another method used by the insurgents to harm Western forces is the recruitment of Afghan security forces to kill Western soldiers. This issue caused a serious deterioration in the level of trust between the sides, because it was difficult for the Western troops to know which of the Afghans would shoot at them.²⁰ This modus operandi has had strategic

ramifications, evident in France's declaration that it was moving up the withdrawal of its troops from 2014 to 2013 following the death of four French soldiers at the hands of an Afghani soldier on January 20, 2012.²¹

Pakistan's Importance in the Eyes of the United States

The United States sees Pakistan as a key player in the war against terror and in future developments in Afghanistan. However, the US capability to fight the Taliban in Afghanistan is limited when the organization enjoys safe refuge in Pakistan. The killing of Osama Bin Laden by the United States in the heart of Pakistan in May 2011 and the accusation by senior US officials that Pakistan is aiding terrorist organizations to carry out attacks against Western troops in Afghanistan have raised the level of tension between the two countries.²²

The United States has invested much effort in reaching appropriate understandings with Pakistan concerning the fight against terror, but apparently to no avail. Pakistan is a divided and torn country, with a limited level of governability and a government and military with conflicting interests on the issue of cooperation with the Americans. Even if the United States could reach an acceptable agreement with officials within Pakistan, it is doubtful if Islamabad could fulfill its part of the agreement. Moreover, it appears that Pakistan and the United States have relatively conflicting interests concerning a political settlement in Afghanistan. Although this article does not offer an explanation of overall Pakistani policy, a number of major points in dispute should be noted. While the United States is interested in leaving behind a unified, functioning Afghanistan, Pakistan is interested in a weak neighbor that can be easily influenced. There are those who believe that Pakistan is interested in an Afghanistan that is strong enough to prevent an export of violence, but too weak to promote an independent policy.²³ Any successful compromise in Afghanistan will aid in building a political entity that is too strong for Pakistan's taste. Pakistan's dual policy – support for some of the terrorist organizations on the one hand, and declarations of cooperation with the Americans in fighting terror on the other – allows it to retain US aid, but also to use these organizations as convenient bargaining chips. Pakistan is interested, *inter alia*, in ensuring acceptance of its Western borders, control over the Pashtuns in its territory, and a reduction in the ties between Afghanistan and India to the extent possible.

Afghanistan is likewise a playing field for other states in the region. Iran, India, Russia, China, and other countries, in addition to Pakistan, have vested interests in what transpires there. Iran, which fears a US presence in Afghanistan, is attempting to encourage anti-American sentiment in the country and allows Taliban members to take shelter in its territory. Iran and Afghanistan have signed a defense agreement, and Iran is bribing Afghani officials in order to promote its goals in the country.²⁴ In addition, because NATO supply routes in Pakistan have been shut down, Russia, which fears the spillover of terrorism and drugs from Afghanistan, has recently examined the possibility of allowing NATO to establish a permanent logistics base in Russia for NATO forces in Afghanistan.²⁵ This may indicate that Russia fears pernicious developments following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The combination of Afghanistan's basic weakness, the division between the various factions in the country, and the intervention of foreign states is therefore a problem for reconstructing the country. As a result, given the interests of other countries in Afghanistan, it is highly doubtful whether a COIN strategy can work, even if the United States were prepared to commit to Afghanistan for a longer period.

Have US Goals in Afghanistan been Achieved?

Two contradictory positions may explain the acceleration of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. On the one hand, US military officials, in particular Defense Secretary Panetta, claim that good control has been achieved over the country: terrorist leaders have been killed, attempts at state-building are bearing fruit, and a US agreement with the Taliban that is good for the United States is within reach. Therefore, an early withdrawal and a focus on aid to the Afghan government are the necessary steps. On the other hand, a document written by the CIA and other US intelligence agencies shows little progress in Afghanistan. The US army has not achieved significant control over the territory, despite having inflicted heavy losses on the Taliban. The Taliban and its affiliates are still operating from Pakistan and from the eastern provinces of Afghanistan, and the Afghan government is corrupt and ineffective, which means that the military gains are in danger. The large number of losses and domestic economic problems make it difficult for the United States to invest the necessary efforts to confront the Taliban.²⁶ Hence, the

US withdrawal from Afghanistan is likely to be seen as a move intended to reduce the cost in human lives and the heavy economic burden.²⁷

Bob Woodward reveals that President Obama was skeptical about the COIN strategy. In his book *Obama's Wars*, he presents the decision-making process behind the change in policy in Afghanistan in 2009.²⁸ Woodward claims that Obama was more interested in an honorable withdrawal from the country than in long term nation-building in Afghanistan. He saw the building of the Afghani state as a secondary goal and as a means of allowing a safe withdrawal of forces. Senior US officials provided the President with a series of explanations as to why a COIN strategy would not succeed in Afghanistan. Thus, for example, General Karl Eikenberry, former commander of US forces in Afghanistan and today the US ambassador there, claimed at a meeting of the National Security Council in October 2009 that the COIN strategy was too ambitious, given the limitations in resources and the lack of a reliable ally in Kabul.²⁹ Then-Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen added that it will take three to five years to build an Afghan army of some 240,000 soldiers.³⁰

The considerable effort made by the United States in Afghanistan has in fact borne its first fruits. However, there are widespread reports of corruption, lack of discipline, and disloyalty among the troops, and their level of skill is low. State-building is a long process that requires a large investment over the course of many years, and functioning institutions cannot be created in a short time. According to a World Bank report, it will take Afghanistan approximately thirty years to recover completely and function as a state with a stable government.³¹

It can be assumed that Obama had the necessary tools to understand that it is not possible to implement a full COIN strategy in Afghanistan in such a short period of time without a strong, loyal ally in Kabul. The intervention of foreign players in the process, especially Pakistan, does not contribute to the effective implementation of the strategy. Therefore, the building of the Afghani security forces and the transfer of responsibility to them can be seen as secondary goals whose function is to serve the central goal of a safe withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Regarding the military goals in Afghanistan, the United States under Obama has inflicted extensive damage on al-Qaeda and its ability to threaten US physical security from its seat in Pakistan. Nevertheless, it

will be difficult to see the Taliban significantly routed, as evidenced by its activity in recent years. Through its special envoy, Mark Grossman, the United States is conducting negotiations with Taliban officials in order to reach a political settlement that will allow the withdrawal of US troops. Ostensibly, the US military campaign, along with Afghan state-building, is supposed to help the negotiations succeed. The Taliban should be convinced that it will not defeat the United States and the Karzai government, and therefore that it is preferable to compromise on limited control of Afghanistan in exchange for a cessation of fighting. The initial proposal by the Obama administration to the Taliban and the Haqqani network included demands to “renounce violence; irrevocably cut their ties with al-Qaeda; and abide by the Afghan constitution, including its protections for women and minorities.”³²

Nevertheless, it is not likely that this proposal will be accepted. First, the United States is already committed to withdrawing from the region, regardless of whether a political compromise is achieved. Panetta’s announcement that the withdrawal will occur earlier is only likely to emphasize the US commitment to a rapid withdrawal. Second, if Pakistan is not included, the ability to defeat the Taliban is likely to be very limited. It appears that the Taliban and the Haqqani network do not have much interest in agreeing to the US proposal. A compromise with the United States may well in fact be considered surrender just before victory. Even if agreement is achieved between the sides, it is very doubtful whether the Karzai government, working with a limited number of US troops, could enforce it. It is possible that after the US withdrawal, the Taliban and the Haqqani network will attempt to establish control over the country, which is a nightmare scenario for Afghanistan’s minority groups.

The issue of the withdrawal is troubling to Afghanistan’s minorities in general, and to the Shiite Hazaras, who were slaughtered under the rule of the Sunni Taliban, in particular. They claim that the Taliban will fill the vacuum left by NATO forces after the withdrawal and that the road to a civil war will be short. Hazara leader Mohammad Mohaqqiq, a former member of the Northern Alliance, which fought the Taliban, stated: “I don’t believe in a miracle occurring, that the Taliban will change their way of thought, accept the Afghan constitution, [and] believe in democracy.”³³

Various claims have been made concerning the change in US policy, connecting the move to the economic crisis and the election campaign in the United States. In a speech declaring success against al-Qaeda and the

Taliban, President Obama mentioned in the same breath the heavy costs associated with fighting in Afghanistan. According to the President, the United States does not need to waste billions of dollars overseas while it is fighting an economic crisis at home. In addition, America is tired of dealing with the issue. The trauma of September 11 is receding, and the popularity of investing significant resources in the region is declining.³⁴

Indeed, it appears that the economic crisis is having a tremendous impact on the American way of thinking. Long term commitments and state-building processes are not consistent with a reduction in defense expenditures in the United States in the coming decade. Obama's State of the Union address in January 2012 reiterated the principles of his approach. Most of the speech focused on the economic crisis, including the need to reduce defense expenditures. Obama emphasized the strikes against al-Qaeda leaders and the interruption of the Taliban's momentum, but he did not discuss efforts at state-building in Afghanistan much. According to the President, American successes in Afghanistan make it possible to withdraw forces from a position of strength.³⁵ In practice, it is doubtful whether the United States can quickly reduce the large budgets allocated to the region without this backfiring. A hasty retreat is likely to cause the collapse of the local economy and to indicate that the United States has failed in building the Afghani state.

A Look toward the Future

Time will tell if the United States does in fact keep its commitment to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2013. It appears that United States policy is relatively flexible, given the commitment to continue to support the Afghan government while leaving advisors and Special Forces there. At least in the medium term, the combination of continuing US support, the existing infrastructure of the Afghan government, and the Taliban's preference for focusing on Afghanistan can be expected to allow the United States to contain the Afghan problem. This does not mean that the situation in Afghanistan will be totally calm or that the current Afghan government will survive over the long term. Nevertheless, it is possible that from the point of view of the United States, as long as events in Afghanistan do not threaten US security, the situation will allow it to focus on other challenges, including Iran.

Therefore, the conclusion is that the United States has not succeeded, in spite of tremendous efforts, in reaching all the *official* goals it defined in 2009. While al-Qaeda has been greatly weakened, the goal of building the Afghani state and creating a strong government with security forces that are effective in the fight against insurgents has not been completely achieved. It is doubtful whether the current Afghani government will last for a long time without a massive US troop presence.

Nevertheless, the main goal of the US fighting in Afghanistan was to protect the physical security of the United States. It is not likely that the Taliban will strike targets outside Afghan and Pakistani territory in the near future. Therefore, if the Taliban does not cooperate any more with al-Qaeda in the global campaign against the United States and the violence in Afghanistan does not harm US physical security, this goal will have been achieved. Such a state of affairs could be registered as a relative success, and thus an early US withdrawal from Afghanistan would not be a failure. On the other hand, if after the US withdrawal the Taliban again took control of the government and provided shelter for organizations with ties to global jihad, then it would appear that the enormous investment in Afghanistan did not achieve its goal, despite the strategic change made by Obama. In such a case, US fighting in Afghanistan is likely to be recorded in the pages of history as a failure.

Notes

- 1 Elisabeth Bumiller, "U.S. to End Combat Role in Afghanistan as Early as Next Year, Panetta Says," *New York Times*, February 1, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/02/world/asia/panetta-moves-up-end-to-us-combat-role-in-afghanistan.html>. Various clarifications were issued after Panetta's statement. The details of the withdrawal (including planned dates) are likely to be finalized only during the May 2012 Chicago NATO summit.
- 2 Yoram Schweitzer and Sean London, "Obama's Afghanistan-Pakistan Policy: Challenges and Objectives," *Strategic Assessment* 12, no. 4 (2010): 101-14, <http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291267610000.pdf>.
- 3 Jordan Fabiab and Aaron Blake, "Gates: Bush Lacked Afghan Strategy," *The Hill*, September 27, 2009, <http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/60461-gates-bush-lacked-afghanistan-strategy-obamas-is-first-real-one>.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 "Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan," United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, June 8, 2011, <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/SPRT%20112-21.pdf>.

- 6 Ian S. Livingston and Michael O'Hanlon, "Afghanistan Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-9/11 Afghanistan," Brookings, January 30, 2012, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/Programs/FP/afghanistan%20index/index.pdf>.
- 7 Anthony H. Cordesman and Arleigh A. Burke, "The Afghanistan-Pakistan War at the End of 2011," CSIS, November 15, 2011, http://csis.org/files/publication/111115_Afghanistan_at_End_2011.pdf.
- 8 "Afghanistan," *New York Times*, March 1, 2012, <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/afghanistan/index.html>.
- 9 Matthias Gebauer, "Karzai Warns U.S. over Night Raids," *Spiegel*, May 5, 2011, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,801880,00.html>.
- 10 Bill Roggio and Alexander Mayer, "Charting the Data for U.S. Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004–2012," *The Long War Journal*, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes.php>.
- 11 Eric Schmitt, "Lull in Strikes by U.S. Drones Aids Militants in Pakistan," *New York Times*, January 7, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/08/world/asia/lull-in-us-drone-strikes-aids-pakistan-militants.html?pagewanted=1>.
- 12 Roggio and Mayer, "Charting the Data."
- 13 *The Year of the Drone*, <http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/drones#2012chart>.
- 14 Patrick Wintour, "Afghanistan Withdrawal: Barack Obama Says 33,000 Troops Will Leave Next Year," *Guardian*, June 23, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/23/afghanistan-withdrawal-barack-obama-troops>.
- 15 "NATO Claims 'Successful Year' in Afghanistan," *Express Tribune*, January 24, 2012, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/326377/nato-claims-successful-year-in-afghanistan/>.
- 16 Alissa J. Rubin, "Taliban Using Modern Means to Add to Sway," *New York Times*, October 4, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/05/world/asia/taliban-using-modern-means-to-add-to-sway.html?pagewanted=1&r=2&ref=afghanistan>.
- 17 "Afghanistan Annual Report 2011: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict," United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, February 2012, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/AF/UNAMA_Feb2012.pdf.
- 18 Alissa J. Rubin, "Record Number of Afghan Civilians Died in 2011, Mostly in Insurgent Attacks, U.N. Says," *New York Times*, February 4, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/04/world/asia/afghanistan-civilian-deaths-hit-record-un-says.html?ref=asia><http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/04/world/asia/afghanistan-civilian-deaths-hit-record-un-says.html?ref=asia>.
- 19 Ben Farmer, "Taliban Attack on Central Kabul Targets U.S. Embassy and NATO HQ," *Telegraph*, September 13, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/8760726/Taliban-attack-on-central-Kabul-targets-US-embassy-and-Nato-HQ.html>.

- 20 Lolita C. Baldor, "Attacks by Afghans on U.S. Troops often Personal," *Associated Press*, February 1, 2012, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/feb/1/attacks-afghans-us-troops-often-personal>.
- 21 "France to Cut Afghan Combat Role, Leave 2013," *New York Times*, January 27, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2012/01/27/world/asia/27reuters-france-afghanistan.html?ref=world>.
- 22 Dan Barak, Einav Yogev, and Yoram Schweitzer, "A Troubled Geostrategic Marriage: U.S.-Pakistan Relations," *Military and Strategic Affairs* 3, no. 2 (2011): 33-47, <http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291326273370.pdf>.
- 23 Ashley J. Tellis, "Gambling on Reconciliation to Save a Transition," Carnegie Endowment for Peace, December 2011, p. 9.
- 24 Ernesto Londono, "Iran Intensifies Effort to Influence Policy in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, January 5, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/iran-strives-to-play-spoiler-in-afghanistan/2012/01/01/gIQAZ6gCbP_story.html.
- 25 Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russia: U.S. Can Use Air Base for Troop Transit," *Air Force Times*, March 14, 2012, <http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2012/03/ap-russia-us-can-use-air-base-for-troop-transit-031412/>.
- 26 Ken Dilanian and S. Cloud, "U.S. Intelligence Report on Afghanistan Sees Stalemate," January 11, 2012, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-intel-afghan-20120112,0,3639052.story>.
- 27 James Joyner, "Why Obama is Right to Withdraw from Afghanistan Early," *Atlantic*, February 2, 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/02/why-obama-is-right-to-withdraw-from-afghanistan-early/252458/>.
- 28 Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (London & New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).
- 29 Ibid., pp. 212-21.
- 30 Ibid., p. 223.
- 31 Duncan Gardham, "Afghanistan 'Will Take 30 Years to Develop into Proper Democratic State,'" *Telegraph*, January 6, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/9018891/Afghanistan-will-take-30-years-to-develop-into-proper-democratic-state.html>.
- 32 Tellis, "Gambling on Reconciliation," p. 5.
- 33 Rob Taylor, "Afghan Hazara Leader Skeptical of Taliban Peace," *Reuters*, January 30, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/30/us-afghanistan-talks-hazara-idUSTRE80T10H20120130>.
- 34 Wintour, "Afghanistan Withdrawal."
- 35 "Remarks by the President in the State of the Union Address," January 24, 2012, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/24/remarks-president-state-union-address>.