

Conflict Studies Research Centre



**The Causes
& Consequences
of Strategic Failure in
Afghanistan & Iraq**

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Key Points

- * The indicators of strategic failure in Afghanistan and Iraq will become visible in late 2004 and 2005 when presidential and parliamentary elections are due to take place.
- * Strategic failure in either case, and even more so in both, will promote spill-over into the wider region of the weaknesses, violence and hatreds that these collapsed or failed states will generate.
- * Both states are likely to remain 'soft':
 - * Afghanistan with façade institutions;
 - * Iraq as a benign autocracy or an unstable federation.
- * The consequences of such failure would include:
 - * a boost to terrorism globally, a re-legitimisation of the ideologies that support terrorist groups;
 - * the fatal undermining of the Bush Administration's Grand Strategy as outlined in the post-9/11 National Security Strategy;
 - * a further fracturing of the transatlantic alliance.
- * It is possible, but doubtful, that this fracturing provides a possibility for the reconstitution of rules and norms that could promote legitimate interventions in support of good governance and global stability.

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Introduction: Thinking the Unthinkable

In April 2004 US President George W Bush stated in stark, almost apocalyptic terms: 'The consequences of failure in Iraq would be unthinkable. Every friend of America and Iraq would be betrayed to prison and murder as a new tyranny arose. Every enemy of America and the world would celebrate, proclaiming our weakness and decadence, and using that victory to recruit a new generation of killers.'¹ Thinking the unthinkable following the NATO Istanbul Summit in June 2004, NATO secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer raised the spectre of Afghanistan and Iraq emerging as failed states unless the US and international community found ways to work together to save them: 'Can we afford two failed states in pivotal regions?' He stated: 'It is both undesirable and unacceptable if either Afghanistan or Iraq were lost. The international community can't afford to see those countries going up in flames. There would be enormous repercussions for stability, and not only in those regions.'²

Although President Bush has praised Afghanistan as a model for Iraq, both attempts at Western-backed state-building projects are precarious. Increasingly experts and analysts are arguing that the expectations of success in Afghanistan and Iraq have to be substantially lowered: the power of the democratic idea as a catalyst for a reordering of power in the broader Middle East is no longer perceived to be a likely outcome. If we are to consider the likelihood of strategic failure, we must first define our terms. What do we understand by strategy and what constitutes strategic failure?

To elaborate a Grand Strategy is to give coordination and direction to 'all the resources of a nation or band of nations, towards the attainment of political objectives'.³ Strategic studies focuses upon the bridge between military means and political goals, in particular upon the application of military power to achieve political objectives: 'The theory and practice of the use, and threat of use, of organized force for political purposes'.⁴ According to these definitions strategic failure can be measured in terms of the effectiveness of the means (policy or strategy), in securing the ends (attainment or not of strategic objectives) and the ultimate impact upon the success of the Grand Strategy (underpin or undermine). A failure of policy may still allow for strategic success (the attainment of strategic objectives) to be achieved if the policy means to the strategic ends were flawed. Similarly, a successful execution of policy in and of itself may not secure the strategic goals, if there had been a failure to align policy to the attainment of strategic objectives.

Both the US's National Security Strategy (NSS) of September 2002 and the EU's Security Strategy of December 2003 identified failed states, WMD proliferation, terrorism and regional conflicts as key strategic threats to the stability of the

international system and to states. The US NSS identified a dangerous nexus between terrible weapons, terrorists, tyrants and failed states as the greatest threat to US national security. The challenge was to counter these emergent or actual threats using all means, including military intervention if necessary, to avoid direct threats to US territory and national interests. Such interventions would ultimately aim to reduce and manage the underlying causes of dysfunctionality that had generated terrorists and tyranny: endemic despotism, corruption, poverty and economic stagnation. In this way such rogue (Iraq) or failed states (Afghanistan) could no longer threaten the region or US and by extension transatlantic strategic interests. In Afghanistan the Taliban regime supported al Qaeda terrorists, which had been directly responsible for the 9/11 attacks. Without intervention to kill or capture al Qaeda members, and associates and supporters within the Taliban regime, Afghanistan would continue to pose a threat to the US, its friends and allies.

The stated strategic objective of intervention in Iraq rested upon the need to address three overriding threats of a strategic nature, which rendered the Iraqi regime, in the words of President Bush, 'a threat of unique urgency'.⁵ The Iraqi regime possessed chemical and biological WMD capability, according to US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.⁶ Vice President Dick Cheney highlighted a nuclear threat: 'We believe he has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons'.⁷ The urgency of this threat was reinforced by President Bush: 'Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof – the smoking gun – that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud'.⁸ Saddam Hussein was also a threat, President Bush informed the world: 'because he is dealing with al Qaeda'.⁹ Vice President Cheney was equally assured - Saddam Hussein: 'had an established relationship with al Qaeda'.¹⁰ At the cessation of 'major combat operations' in Iraq, President Bush again linked al Qaeda to the events of 9/11: 'The battle of Iraq is one victory in a war on terror that began on September 11, 2001 – and still goes on ... [T]he liberation of Iraq ... removed an ally of al Qaeda'.¹¹

Many expert assessments suggest that mildly authoritarian autocracy in the case of Iraq or stable but ineffective governance in Afghanistan appear to be unfolding. In realpolitik terms, such a scenario, although less than optimal, still meets a minimalist acceptable strategic outcome. The emergence of an authoritarian state ruled by a strong man who is less brutal than Saddam in Iraq would not be considered to constitute strategic failure. In Afghanistan, this might even be considered halfway to strategic success, given the weakness of the current president in the face of warlords who dominate the provinces. The creation of stable and sustainable new regimes that are pro-Western and serve to demonstrate US global leadership would be considered very successful.

However, as the US' stated strategic objective in Afghanistan and Iraq was to eliminate rogue and failed states and thereby combat WMD proliferation and the nexus between tyrants, terrible weapons, terrorists and failed states, the prospect of a return to the past – of regimes that are as rogue or failed as the ones that were 'changed' - would even by the most optimistic interpretation be generally agreed to meet in full the criteria of strategic failure. In this context ousting the Taliban and Saddam might be considered operational successes, but strategic failures. Were this outcome to unfold, it would throw the spotlight onto the basis on which operational objectives are formulated, and how they too often do not contribute to strategic ones. Moreover, if we measure strategic failure in terms of a costs/benefits analysis – then it would be possible to argue that Afghanistan and Iraq could be stabilised, even democratized, but strategic failure still unfolds. Here

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a calculation would balance the stabilization of these two states and the removal of them from the threat column against the costs in terms of US blood, money, its ability to conduct a Grand Strategy that relies on benign hegemony, international consent underpinned by strong alliances and where necessary pre-emption.¹² In other words, if the US gains the support of pro-western but repressive regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq and in the process undermines traditional alliances throughout the region and so its ability to conduct its Grand Strategy, strategic failure unfolds.

Given the current trajectories in Afghanistan and Iraq, how likely are these worst-case scenarios? If we are prepared to 'think the unthinkable', what might be the consequences of western strategic failure? This article will argue that in the case of Afghanistan, the stated longer-term strategic objective that took a 'coalition of the willing' to Kabul and beyond has now been lost. Afghanistan will not emerge stable and democratic, but rather at best a 'soft state' in which façade institutions at the centre more or less contain a re-established narco-terrorist nexus, warlordism and neo-Taliban activity. This unstable equilibrium runs the real risks of emerging as a fully-fledged consolidated narco-terrorist state. As this article will argue, Afghanistan under these conditions is more likely than not to threaten neighbours and the West. In the case of Iraq the ostensible strategic rationale for war has been comprehensively discredited, and the attainment of the stated longer-term strategic objectives of the war appear, at best, open to question. Iraq can experience a benign autocracy that emerges in response to the failures to stabilise it, and in which federalism maintains a balance between competing centre and periphery forces. The façade of federalism is more likely than not to crack, leading at worst to a failed state in which fundamentalist terrorist groups and nationalist insurgent forces can operate at will, unless political will exists to force what could only be a short term 'solution': the imposition of a western-backed repressive regime which is unsustainable in the longer term.

The explicit politico-constitutional indicators of strategic failure in Afghanistan and Iraq will become apparent in late 2004 and 2005 when presidential and parliamentary elections are due to take place. The failure of these elections either to take place or to be held in the context of insecurity, violence and manipulation, in conditions that are patently neither free nor fair, will demonstrate that these states are emerging as less than free, stable or democratic entities. Rather, it will serve to highlight underlying systemic, structural and institutional weaknesses in the international approach to counter-insurgency and nation and state-building in Afghanistan and Iraq. It will progressively push forward the current trajectory that moves from soft state to failed state with the danger of collapsed states emerging. This prospect forces analysts and policy makers to begin to deal with and if possible contain and minimise the consequences at this stage. Strategic failure in either case, and even more so in both, would increase instability within these states and promote the export and spill over of the weaknesses, violence and hatreds that they would generate. The consequences will be almost entirely negative and reverberate far beyond the regions they are located within, and would include: a boost to terrorism globally, helping re-legitimise the ideologies that support terrorist groups; the fatal undermining of the Bush Administration's grand strategy as outlined in the post-9/11 National Security Strategy; and a further fracturing of the transatlantic alliance. In terms of benefits, however, it is possible that this fracturing might provide a possibility for a re-examination of the norms that could promote legitimate interventions in support of good governance and global stability.

Afghanistan: Tactical Victory, Strategic Defeat?

On 7 October a US-led 'coalition of the willing' attacked Afghanistan after the Taliban had proved 'unwilling or unable' to detain and extradite Osama bin Laden and other al Qaeda members for their part in the planning and implementation of the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington. By November the Taliban had capitulated and al Qaeda training camps and other assets were overrun as the capital fell to primarily US Special Forces and Northern Alliance troops. By late 2001 the legal basis for the Bonn Agreement (which was the result of the UN-sponsored conference on post-Taliban Afghanistan) was in place and the Bonn process began in January 2002 with the creation of an Interim Government of Afghanistan, which was tasked to set up a Loyal Jirga - a traditional Grand Assembly based on tribal representatives. In June 2002 this elected Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun leader from Kandahar, Head of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan and appointed a Transitional Authority, which aimed to prepare a new constitution and hold national elections in mid-2004.¹³ The international community pledged support for the stabilization and post-conflict reconstruction of Afghanistan, and an ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) for six-month periods respectively under UK, Turkish, German-Dutch and then NATO command, monitored and aided this effort.¹⁴ For six months starting 9 August 2004 the Eurocorps assumed command of ISAF, thereby taking over NATO operations in Afghanistan, with their mission to protect the Karzai government and to enable the presidential elections to be held on 9 October and the parliamentary elections in spring 2005.¹⁵

In Afghanistan there exists a mutually reinforcing set of sources of insecurity that undermine the ISAF mission to stabilize and then democratize the state. The most worrying and enduring source of long term instability and state collapse is the exponential increase in opium production and export. With the ISAF remit limited to Kabul in 2003, opium exports were 3,600 tonnes in 2003, estimated to be valued at \$35bn and consisting of over 75% of the world's supply. They earned Afghans \$2.3bn - 50% of the country's legitimate GDP and five times the state budget. By contrast, in the last year of Taliban rule in 2001 Afghanistan produced less than 5% of this amount. In 2004, opium production is expected to increase further:¹⁶ US government sources indicate that traffickers will produce between 5,400-7,200 tonnes in 2004, an increase of between 50-100% compared to 2003. Production and export is now integral to the political economy: not only is an estimated 7% of the population economically benefiting from the profits, but factional commanders and central authorities are corrupted by it and thus have a strong vested interest in maintaining and increasing production. As a result, the economic and political reform process in Afghanistan is becoming stalled and subverted by the illegal drugs industry.

Some analysts have argued that even taking into account decades of warfare prior to the overthrow of the Taliban, the institutionalization of post-Taliban power in Afghanistan has failed to take root, providing an environment within which a failed state will re-emerge, one that can incubate once again anti-Western terrorists. President Karzai and the central ministries represent a façade which with one hard blow - such as the assassination of the president - could be knocked over, revealing the Potemkin-like nature of central 'power structures' in Afghanistan: that is, a power structure characterised by ineffective strategic and structural coherence and little vertical (national through provincial, district and tactical levels) and horizontal (between institutions and actors) linkages within Afghanistan. Indeed, President Karzai himself implicitly accepted this critique, noting that if re-elected for a new

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five-year term in October, he would do things 'very differently' and not trap himself in a coalition with people who did not support change. Whilst he would still have to bring factional leaders and warlords into government, he would balance this with 'as much of a professional, technocratic cabinet as possible, especially in the departments where there is the need for them'.¹⁷

Both ISAF and US forces are perceived to have been severely under-resourced, insufficient and inadequate to meet the demands of the unstable and deteriorating environment. ISAF consists of 6,500 troops, and a further 2,000 were added following the Istanbul Summit.¹⁸ The US has a larger troop presence, with close to 20,000 troops committed to operation 'Enduring Freedom', but from its inception in 2002, the Combined Joint Task Force 76 (CJTF-76), currently under the command of Lt Gen David Barno, had been given a more purely 'military' role by the US Department of Defense than the 'political' state-building role of ISAF. CJTF-76 is primarily responsible for fighting pockets of Taliban throughout Afghanistan and focuses on coordinating the ongoing hunt for Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda fighters. Although it contributed to reconstruction efforts it refused to assign more than a few liaison officers and support staff to ISAF command, which in turn is said to fuel the reluctance of NATO allies to risk soldiers outside Kabul. One well informed analyst has argued that US forces 'did not extend the reach of the international security force outside Kabul, was wary of asking NATO to get involved, provided little funding for reconstruction aid, most crucially, refused to help in the demobilization of Afghan militias'.¹⁹ In the first 6 months of 2004 this policy was changed as, largely on the advice of the US ambassador to Kabul, Zalmay Khalilzad, and Lt Gen Barno, US forces began to push for the demobilization of militias, for greater US-ISAF coordination in Afghanistan and an integrated counterinsurgency programme that targets drug lords and terrorists, attempting to break the link between the two.²⁰

Despite the rhetoric, the ISAF operation itself has been characterised by a record of broken planning and coordination mechanisms and a failure to staff the mission adequately.²¹ It took NATO 6 months to deploy three helicopters to Afghanistan to support ISAF operations. The 'S' in SecGen and SACEUR has become identified more with 'suppliant' than 'supreme' or 'secretary' as both have had to beg member states to align political promises with force deployments and resource commitments: 'I have felt like a beggar sometimes, and if the secretary general of NATO feels like a beggar, the system is wrong'.²² The systemic weaknesses that have still to be addressed include a lack of contingency funding, long-term planning ability and force deployment means. It is not clear whether ISAF has a realistic idea of an end state outcome in Afghanistan and therefore has no real road map that allows for a coherent exit strategy. An internal ISAF-commissioned report attests that the security environment is deteriorating and can be considered increasingly fragile. ISAF does not eradicate drugs production. Nor does it address long term underlying causes of dysfunctionality. Although ISAF is deployed under an Article 5 NATO mandate, NATO member states do not act as if this is a priority, let alone the leading priority facing NATO. As the NATO Secretary General noted, NATO's first military operation outside of its historic area of operations could fail.

ISAF is not the main security provider in Afghanistan. The Afghan National Army (ANA) has a dominant role, and it is the performance of these indigenous elements that counts. What then of the indigenous forces?

The ANA is emergent and the Afghan Militia Forces (AMF) are slowly being disarmed. However, warlords and factional commanders, particularly those within

the Northern Alliance who were re-legitimised by their role in the defeat of the Taliban, are more powerful than central authorities.²³ CJTF-76 is slowly training the ANA, which currently has around 11,000 trained troops, in sharp contrast to the size of the private armies and militias the warlords control. To take one example, Marshal Muhammed Qasim Fakim, Minister of Defence, has a private army of around 30,000. Warlords have the capacity to intimidate local voters, control the electoral process and threaten the central government. As a consequence, the Demobilization, Disarmament and Rehabilitation (DDR) programme and UN's Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) have been unable to meet demobilization targets for the militias: by June 2004, 40,000 out of 100,000 soldiers should have been demobilized but only 10,000 (some reports put this figure at 4,000) had been. Figures are difficult to verify and it is in the self-interest of militia commanders to inflate numbers to gain greater remuneration. The most recent figures estimated the number of AMF needing to be demobilized (total) at 50,000-55,000. Over 13,000 have been disarmed and demobilized and over 12,000 of these have entered reintegration programmes. The current, revised target for DDR is 40% of the total by the October Presidential elections.²⁴ It is interesting to note that President Karzai has offered some of them leading government posts after the election.²⁵ Three powerful warlords have already been 'promoted' to government positions: Army General Atta Mohammed was appointed governor of northern Balkh province; General Hazrat Ali the police chief of eastern Nangarhar province; and General Khan Mohammed police chief of southern Kandahar province.²⁶

President Hamid Karzai has argued that without disarmament and demobilization of Afghanistan's private militias 'the Afghan state will have really serious difficulties'.²⁷ The threat private militias pose to the holding of free and fair elections is now greater than the neo-Taliban insurgency. Although the pervasive presence of anti-government forces in the districts of Uruzgan province and Zabul make political activism very difficult, in other regions such as the city of Herat, governor Ismail Khan does not tolerate open political activism. According to the UN: 'The majority of parties continue to hold clandestine meetings and feel open political activities would be tantamount to "political suicide" because of the governor's intolerance.'²⁸ As a result, only new, decisive and forceful action would allow the disbandment of 60 to 70% of the militias before the parliamentary elections in April 2005, according to the leader of the joint election commission, Zakim Shah. However, this more muscular policy is not shared by Jean Arnault, the leader of the UN mission in Afghanistan, which is helping in the disarmament and elections. He noted that the UN favoured disarmament through cooperation rather than coercive sanctions.²⁹

Security is increasingly lacking in the provinces and this is indicated by the accelerated trend of murders against members of the ANA, AMF, the Joint Election Management Board, NGOs and contractors in the provinces, with an increase in the size and number of no-go areas. At present the state simply lacks the ability to bring to bear what little coercive power it can muster against recalcitrant and revanchist warlords.

Although the US-led operation 'Enduring Freedom' has co-operated with Pakistan's military and security services in order to track bin Laden in the tribal areas that border the two states, such action could precipitate a civil war in Pakistan.³⁰ As Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage noted, stability interdependence between the two countries cannot be down-played: '... if these Talib elements are able to freely cross into Afghanistan to conduct destabilising activities, this is clearly not in Afghanistan's interest, and it's not in Pakistan's interest. Stability in

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Afghanistan equals stability in the region. I don't see how Pakistan can have the stable and prosperous future that President Musharraf wishes for his nation unless that same stability and prosperity exists here.³¹

By July 2004 UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had warned that the peace process had reached a critical stage. Although more than seven million of an estimated electorate of nearly 10 million had by then been registered to vote (and women make up 40% of the number), unless security improved it would be impossible to prepare and hold planned parliamentary elections in April 2005, let alone the twice delayed (June and September 2003) presidential elections on 9 October 2004.³² The UN reported in mid-August 2004 as the registration closed that over 9.9 million Afghans had registered.³³ This election is critical to stability in Afghanistan. On 26 July 2004 President Karzai replaced Gen Mohamed Fahim, widely regarded as the most powerful of the warlords, as his Vice Presidential running mate with Akmad Zia Masood, a Tajik from the Panshir valley. This move undercut Karzai's support amongst Afghanistan's most influential constituency and those that can do most to disrupt and manipulate the elections. These leaders' coercive militias dominate politics in the localities.³⁴ Dostum and Qanoonis represent the biggest threat that Karzai will not win outright 50% of the vote, so causing a run-off. Were Karzai to win the run-off he would be weakened, forced to compromise with these warlords. Were he to lose the run-off, especially to a non-Pashtun, then civil war would become much more likely.³⁵

Neo-Taliban attacks in southern and eastern provinces, which have caused the UN to withdraw international staff from rural areas, have continued despite US-led Operation Avalanche - designed 'to keep them on the run'. UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi has noted: 'There is little doubt there is support for destabilisation in Afghanistan in some quarters in Pakistan'. Although President Musharraf denies that his government arms and support the Taliban, some analysts have argued that it is not just rogue elements in Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) that direct Pakistan's Afghan policy.³⁶ In the Pakistani tribal areas, Northwest Frontier Province and Baluchistan, an alliance of six religious parties, the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal, which had contested elections two years ago on a pro-Taliban platform, now support the government against foreign fighters and local Wazir tribesmen, dug in along a belt stretching from North Waziristan to South Waziristan and into the remote Shawal, Zabul and Kandahar districts in Afghanistan. Despite this support, Pakistan's tribal areas now constitute a base for Taliban and al Qaeda 'from where they have spun a web of terror from Kabul to Karachi', in the words of President Musharraf.³⁷

However, this interpretation appears to be discounted by Latif Pedram, the spokesman and co-founder of the newly established Afghanistan National Congress, who will stand as a candidate in the presidency race. He has argued Pakistan is a dominant actor in Afghanistan, but that it acts with implicit US support. He has asserted that Zalmay Khalilzad, President Bush's Afghan-born ambassador and personal envoy to Afghanistan, and President Karzai are in 'constant contact and negotiations' with senior Taliban leaders, including some ministers of the fundamentalist Islamic regime toppled in late 2001:

The talks, mostly conducted at the presidential palace, sometimes with the presence of President Hamid Karzai, are aimed at legitimizing the so-called good Taliban and bringing them back with the help of Pakistan. The real aim of the negotiations between the Americans and British with the dreaded Taliban is to keep Afghanistan firmly under the tutelage of

Pakistan and shutting it to the influence of other regional players such as Iran, Russia, China and India ... The Americans who helped create the Taliban from Pakistan, their best ally in the region, want them back to strengthen the position of Karzai, but under the control of Islamabad. This is also what Pakistan is after. In fact, Pakistan never lost its full control over Afghanistan.³⁸

Interestingly, a July 2004 US Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on US administration policy towards Pakistan supported this contention. The hearing noted that the policy covered three broad areas - counter-terrorism, nuclear proliferation and regional relationships. The Committee expert witnesses argued that there was unwillingness within the administration to question three false assumptions that form the basis of current and past US policy toward Pakistan. Firstly, that Musharraf strives to be a 'moderate' Islamic leader and seeks to wean his country away from jihad-friendly policies. Rather, as his post-9/11 actions demonstrate, he has two objectives: to keep himself in power, and zealously guard the Pakistani army's corporate interests. Secondly, that a US alliance with Pakistan would collapse were Musharraf to be killed or replaced, leading to a Taliban-like regime in Pakistan in control of nuclear weapons. Rather, the successor to Musharraf is likely to be another general who would replicate Musharraf's policy - maintain personal power and the army's corporate interests. Thirdly, that US policy is based on the assumption that the interests of the Pakistani military coincide with those of the US. Rather, the Pakistani army's goals compete with the US strategic objectives of regional peace, Islamic moderation and nuclear non-proliferation. Musharraf is characterised as a 'marginal satisfier'. He seeks to do the bare minimum required by the various interests that compete for his time, to keep the various problems alive in order to maximize his value to the US, and at a strategic level to marginalize the mainstream secular political parties within Pakistan.³⁹

The testimony of these expert witnesses leads one to conclude that Pakistan maintains its own interests in Afghanistan, that these interests do not necessarily coincide with the Afghan state, or those of ISAF and the US, but may actually work against them. Pakistan is indeed the dominant external actor within Afghanistan and its influence can be both malign and benign, reflecting a range of actors within Pakistan - even within the power elites (presidential administration, military and security services) with different loyalties and affiliations. The need for strategic depth that a safe western flank gives Pakistan in its negotiations with India, US pressure to co-operate against terrorism, and economic ties to Afghanistan (Pakistan supplied 25% of all Afghan imports in 2003) moderate destabilization efforts.⁴⁰

How then might we characterise prospects for strategic failure in Afghanistan? Richard Armitage, the US Deputy Secretary of State, has argued that US-led forces would remain in Afghanistan until security throughout the country could be guaranteed: 'A successful conclusion as far as we're concerned will be when the people of Afghanistan can live free of fear permanently, when there are lights on across this country permanently and access to healthcare and education for both sexes permanently.'⁴¹ But as Jaap de Hoop Scheffer's comments demonstrate, expectations of success as originally understood on the eve of and in the immediate post-invasion context have now been drastically lowered from a democratic and stable state, to autocratic but stable, to a default position of warlordism that is more or less containable with little spill-over to neighbours. If narco-terrorism can be more or less managed and contained, then it would be possible to produce an

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assessment of Afghanistan that argues it is not a source of strategic threats to its region, the US, its friends and allies. Were the benchmark of strategic failure to be so lowered, then it could be defined as the emergence of a narco-terrorist state that exports dysfunctionality, rather than simply contains it.

Given drug production, warlordism, neo-Talibanization, the failures of ISAF and the at best ambiguous role of Pakistan, it is unrealistic to expect that Afghanistan will evolve in the short term into a more or less stable, functional state where sustainable and durable governance is in place, centred on a President, state institutions and power structures run from Kabul, whose remit penetrates the periphery, albeit weakly. Under this 'successful' scenario, drugs production and export may constrain the power of the central government, but not to a critical extent. The effect of the narco-business on state development would be comparable to what it had been in the past; that is, warlords would be unable to collectivize their illegal activities, and would operate as discrete and independent entities. They and their activities thus remain more or less manageable and the façade of functioning central state institutions and a domestic and foreign policy making capacity remains in place. Afghanistan emerges as a collection of more or less autonomous districts that share and maintain a collective sense of being 'Afghan', rather than split into provinces identified more by Iranian, Uzbek or Pakistani loyalties and allegiances.⁴² Rather than moving further towards a Colombia-type failed state, Afghanistan in this scenario evolves into a 'soft state'. This type of state can be characterised by the existence of some divisive social enclaves on its territory, and a political process defined by inter-warlord/tribal relations, whilst the unified state continues to exist and central authorities maintain a monopoly over some key functions.⁴³

But is it also unrealistic to expect what might be termed the natural and indigenous governance position in Afghanistan to resume its role as the central dynamic of evolution within the state? Might not warlordism and factional infighting and feuding, though low intensity and more or less containable within the state, become the dominant paradigm? The prospect of a weak but functioning 'soft state' outcome falls from view if drug-induced corruption, neo-Talibanization of provinces wholesale or renewed fighting between warlords become too explicit, especially within a context of the assassination of the president or key ministers, ISAF and NGO personnel.⁴⁴ The key 'known unknown' variable will be the impact of increased drug production and export on politics in Afghanistan.⁴⁵ This issue, which NATO does not address, could ultimately undermine at a fundamental level all but the emergence of a narco-terrorist state.⁴⁶

Mark Galeotti has noted the increasing organisation of the Afghan drug industry after the fall of the Taliban, arguing that while control of the poppy fields remains in the hands of individual local leaders and warlords, they are either acting more like Central American (especially Mexican) 'cartelitos' and beginning to handle some of the processing themselves to then sell to the major distributors - in order to command a better price for their drugs by cutting out some layers of middlemen - or else they are selling on into an increasingly structured 'industry' comprising networks (many based in post-Soviet Central Asia) which handle the whole process, from collecting sacks of poppy seeds through to their processing into heroin and bulk shipments through Russia, the Caucasus or Iran/Turkey into Europe.⁴⁷ Terrorists abhor a vacuum and need finance: Afghanistan offers both.

Strategic failure in Afghanistan would also serve as a strategic setback in the global war on terror. Afghanistan's importance as a source of recruits and especially

terrorist financing would be reconfirmed. Indeed, these activities would continue much more intensely than under the Taliban, as the environment would become more opaque and less controlled than it was under their regime. As a result, the differentiated strategy of al Qaeda and its associates becomes more pronounced, carried forward with even greater determination, with both mass casualty attacks in Euro-Atlantic space and Talibanization efforts through Central Asia and the Middle East much more likely.

Iraq: Civil Society or Civil War?

On June 28 2004 sovereignty was transferred from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to Iyad Allawi, the new interim Iraqi Prime Minister. In January 2005 a Transitional National Assembly (TNA) will be elected. This legislature will then elect a three-person Presidency Council consisting of a president and two deputies. The Presidency Council will by unanimity vote for a Prime Minister who in turn will recommend a Council of Ministers, which the Presidency Council will appoint. The TNA in conjunction with the Presidency Council and the Council of Ministers will constitute the Iraqi Transitional Government and draft a permanent constitution for Iraq, which will be submitted for popular ratification on October 15 2005. Elections will be held under this constitution on December 15 2005 and a government will take office on December 31 2005. It will begin to govern Iraq on 1 January 2006, heralding the emergence of a stable and democratic Iraq.⁴⁸

The emergence of a stable and democratic Iraqi state, let alone a state that could serve as a model or engine in support of domino democratization in the region, is as unlikely now as it was at the conclusion of 'major combat operations', when the weaknesses of post-Phase IV (stabilization, reconstruction and rehabilitation) planning became apparent. Hishal Melhem, a leading Arab journalist who interviewed US Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz for the satellite news station *Al Arabiya*, said: 'It takes my breath away when I think about the scale of the transformation that [Wolfowitz and others] are trying to achieve in the Middle East. It is so radical, so optimistic, so audacious. It is a new American imperium ... They are going to create an earthquake in Iraq that will reverberate throughout the region.'⁴⁹

Reality has undermined rather than underpinned this pre-invasion rhetoric. On his return from democracy-building efforts in Iraq, Larry Diamond, a former senior advisor to the CPA (January–March 2004) and expert in democratization, argued: 'You can't develop democracy without security. In Iraq, it's really a security nightmare that did not have to be. If you don't get it right, nothing else is possible. Everything else is connected to that.'⁵⁰ In May 2004 he added: 'There is only one word for a situation in which you cannot win and you cannot withdraw: quagmire. We are not there yet, but we are close.'⁵¹ Thomas Carothers, a US scholar of democratization at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace who has studied US democracy-building efforts worldwide, noted: 'I have never seen so much loose thinking about democracy. The idea that you can produce a democratic tidal wave throughout the Arab world is a dangerous fantasy. What we are ending up producing is incredible hatred.'⁵² Anthony Cordesman, a strategic studies expert in Washington DC, has argued: 'The option of quickly turning Iraq into a successful, free market democracy was never practical, and was as absurd neo-conservative fantasy as the idea that success in this objective would magically make Iraq an example that would transform the Middle East.'⁵³ Why would Arab leaders, many of

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whom upheld repressive status quo regimes, assist the US in their own suicide, many analysts asked? Even Libyan reforms have been discounted: 'By citing Libya's reforms as the outcome of a threatening foreign policy stance, the Bush administration is substantiating a foreign policy doctrine on a false premise.'⁵⁴

It appears that at best the Iraq campaign represents a 'strategic diversion' in the global war on terror.⁵⁵ The US Senate Intelligence Committee found no link between Saddam Hussein and 9/11, and collaborative links in the 1990s between his regime and al Qaeda were characterised as not of an operational nature.⁵⁶ No WMD stockpiles have been uncovered, undermining the case for the imminence of the threat and supporting the argument that this was not a 'war of necessity' but rather a 'war of choice'.⁵⁷ The Senate Intelligence Committee Report concludes that: 'Most of the major key judgments in the Intelligence Community's October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate, *Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction*, either overstated, or were not supported by, the underlying intelligence reporting. A series of failures, particularly in analytic trade craft, led to the mischaracterization of the intelligence.'⁵⁸

The strategic errors debate, led by former Central Command Commander General Zinni has been well aired, and is important as helping to explain the plethora of strategic compromises and ambiguities, the security vacuum and legitimacy deficits that characterized the 'post-major combat operations' stabilization or Phase IV period after May 2003. Gen Zinni cites ten clear failures:

- abandoning the existing policy of containment;
- promoting a flawed regional strategy;
- creating a false rationale for war in order to maximize public support;
- failing to internationalize the effort;
- underestimating the task;
- propping up and trusting the Iraqi exiles;
- overall lack of planning;
- allocating insufficient military forces;
- installing an inadequate and ad hoc government; and,
- enacting a series of bad decisions on the ground.⁵⁹

The instability is measured by the Brookings Institute Iraq Index, and in the words of economist Paul Krugman: 'Figures on the electricity supply and oil production show a pattern of fitful recovery and frequent reversals; figures on insurgent attacks and civilian casualties show a security situation that got progressively worse, not better; public opinion polls show an occupation that squandered the initial good will.'⁶⁰ In late June 2004 the US General Accounting Office issued a report concluding that Iraq's electricity grid, judicial system and security were much worse than before the war began, and that significant insurgent attacks skyrocketed from 411 in February to 1,169 in May 2004.⁶¹ Attempted (Interim Government Justice Minister) and successful (Governor of Mosul) assassinations of high profile government and regional officials have continued, whilst lower and mid-ranking officials have also been continuously targeted, with approximately 8% (61 out of around 750) of Baghdad city councillors murdered between 2003-2004.⁶²

It is within this context that the new Iraqi Prime Minister has the Herculean task of trying to stabilize Iraq whilst the violence and disruption of an insurgency continues unabated. Such violence underscores the puppet status insurgents ascribe to the interim government and their ability thereby to further undermine the legitimacy of this body. They note that Dr Allawi was a Baathist supporter of Saddam Hussein in

the 1960s and early 1970s, involved in assassinations of opponents to the regime before falling from grace and becoming an exile and asset for US and UK security services (CIA/MI6).⁶³ As a 'strong man' he might be considered an ideal candidate, yet he must navigate a difficult path, beset by two key immediate challenges: maintaining a political distance from the multinational force, while relying on it for military support; and managing the demotion of Sunni power, while promoting the aspirations of the majority Shia population .

Current levels of instability, highlighted by the US-led Najaf military offensive against the rebel Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army fighters and bombings in Baghdad designed to disrupt the National Congress held in August 2004, are not in themselves predestined to spiral downwards towards civil war or failed state status. Such instability is controllable and can be managed and reduced through a calibrated and coherent use of sticks and carrots: co-option where possible, coercive confrontation where necessary. This might allow the interim government space to reverse the CPA's Baghdad-centric, top-down, imposed approach to state building, and adopt a bottom-up state-building effort.⁶⁴ Although the insurgency shapes the strategic landscape, in and of itself it does not amount to strategic failure or necessarily constitute the basis upon which a failed state scenario unfolds in Iraq. As Phebe Marr, a former Senior Researcher and Iraq expert at the National Defense University argues, the minimal US goals should include 'a state free of terrorism, a state free of weapons of mass destruction, a government, if not friendly, at least not hostile to the US and Israel', and the US should make clear and explicit its intention not to have 'long-term designs on military bases or control of oil'.⁶⁵ The passing by the interim government of the national public safety law will allow for the imposition of emergency Martial Law in Iraq, arrest of suspects without warrants in cases of 'urgency' and the ability to restrict the movements of foreigners. The reassertion of stability by an Iraqi interim government 15 months after the end of 'major combat operations' will imbue this government with more popular legitimacy and support than ever the CPA enjoyed.

It is possible that over the coming months the interim government will trade democratization for stabilization and is likely to be ruthless and effective.⁶⁶ One recent report has suggested three possible future scenarios for Iraq – the best of which is characterised as 'holding together'/'muddle through' in which '(t)he interim government proves inclusive and effective to keep the Shia majority, the Sunni Arab minority, secular nationalists, tribal elders and the Kurdish leaders more or less on board'.⁶⁷ To elaborate on this best-case scenario, in place of a democratic state, expectations are lowered and the prospect of a benign liberal autocracy (which supports order, justice and prosperity but not democracy) is accepted.⁶⁸ Streets are safer, political, economic, cultural minority rights are safeguarded and per capita income rises from \$1,000 pa to nearer \$6,000. This new order will have to be buttressed by a combination of foreign military support and the emergent power institutions within the state and will to many appear as the reassertion of the 'old and impoverished pattern of authoritarian rule under a new guise'.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, as it would not be an explicit carbon copy of the Saddam regime and stability could be maintained, this could still be posited as an acceptable outcome, one that falls short of strategic failure. For this to occur the new interim government must continue to enhance its legitimacy, power institutions and manage federalism.

In the short term it is likely that the interim government will be able to continue to build and then strengthen key institutions of the state, particularly the New Iraqi Army (NIA), police and the Iraqi Civil Defence Force (ICDF). The NIA is designed to

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defend the state rather than the regime and so it will resemble more the old Iraqi army founded in 1921 as a state institution rather than Saddam's Special Republican Guard. It will consist of three divisions of infantry, but without logistics, transport and medical support (which these respective ministries must supply). Thus it is structured to be non-threatening to its neighbours, lacking sustainability and rapid deployability capacity. The NIA will also be representative of the nation, with care taken to balance leadership and ethnic composition amongst the different national groups in Iraq.⁷⁰ By contrast, the ICDF is not recruited nation-wide, but rather from local militias who have been re-designated as having 'national guard' status. Although these units are subordinated to the NIA, the command and control and loyalty of de facto militias and militia leaders represents a key current and future problem.

A benign autocracy would benefit from a federal structure in which the centre can use budgetary federalism and other mechanisms to exert some degree of control over the periphery. Experts have argued that federalism is the 'only workable possibility of preventing ethnic conflict and secessionism as well as establishing a stable democracy in Iraq'.⁷¹ Managing federalism and integrating checks and balances to protect minorities is the key challenge and the path to sustainable stability, but this golden road is strewn with traps that will be hard to avoid. In Iraq approximately 20% of the population consists of Kurds, 55-65% Shia Muslims and 30-40% Sunni Muslims. The dominant political dynamic in the Shia communities is not a drive to a secular political system characterised by a clear division of power between Mosque and State, but rather a theocracy. On this basis, and the understandable reluctance of a once dominant ethnic minority to relinquish power, Arab Sunni revanchism and consequent Sunni/Shia power struggles could still prove a 'trigger' for the fragmentation of Iraq.⁷² Democratic elections are considered more likely to reinforce the political power of separate ethnic and religious groups rather than weaken this identity. Thus macro politics will be defined by ethno-religious party competition, micro-politics by alliance building within the party groups.⁷³ Ideally such a system would allow the centre to control foreign affairs, defence, the currency, state-wide infrastructure projects (transport and oil and gas distribution networks), whilst the regions would enjoy a large degree of autonomy.

A far harder problem for the new interim government to resolve is the 'Kurdish question'. A failure to manage let alone resolve this issue has the very real potential to fracture a multiethnic and multinational state.

'In Iraq, there are ideas and aspirations that are totally antagonistic. There are innovating youngsters, including government officials; the zealots; the Sunna; the Shia; the Kurds; the non-Muslim minorities; the bribes, the sheikhs, and the vast ignorant majority ready to adopt any harmful notion ... Kurdish, Shia, and Sunni tribes who only want to shake off every form of central government. There is still - and I say this with a heart full of sorrow - no Iraqi people, but an unimaginable mass of human beings devoid of any patriotic ideas, imbued with religious traditions and absurdities, connected by no common tie, giving ear to evil, prone to anarchy, and perpetually ready to rise against any government whatsoever. Out of these masses we want to fashion a people which we would train, educate and refine ... the circumstances being what they are, the immenseness of the efforts needed for this cannot be imagined.'⁷⁴

Tension between the Kurds (who live mainly in the North) and Arabs (Shia and Sunni) is the greatest source of instability in Iraq. Can the Kurds be bought off by the Allawi government? Can even a temporary deal be brokered in which Iraq territorial integrity and the sovereignty of the interim government is upheld, and which allows for no loss of the sovereignty the Shia enjoyed under the 'no-fly zone'? As the Kurds fought a civil war in which 3,000 died in the mid-1990s, they are themselves split and bitter rivalries exist between the two main parties – the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) under Ma'sud Barzani in the north west (the capital is Arbil) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) based in the north east (the capital is Suleymaniyah) under Talal Talabani.⁷⁵ An accommodation might be possible were the Kurds to accept two federal entities in the north, allowing divide and rule possibilities to be exploited by the federal government in Baghdad.

However, the key question is the ability of the Allawi government to manage change. Can this interim government, as weak as it is, resist the temptation to unite Sunni and Shia factions around the question of the necessity of exerting executive authority over the whole of the country? Will the Kurds accept anything less than the de facto sovereignty they have enjoyed over the last 12 years and what will their policy be on the question of the degree of control they are able to exert over the oil fields of Kirkuk?⁷⁶ Were they to receive the revenues directly and then pay the centre, rather than receive a cut from the centre (economic and fiscal federalism), would this heighten Turkish fears that economic separatism would be a prelude to outright independence – the ultimate strategic goal of the Kurds?⁷⁷ Who would prevail if there were a disagreement, and what of the 'special status' of Kirkuk? In short, is a federation in Iraq politically manageable or even conceivable without a confederation emerging? Does the state possess the capacity to absorb the conflict potential unleashed by democratization?

A 'soft state' Afghan-type outcome is possible in Iraq: failure to stabilise in the short term leads to a breakdown in governance, with a weak and fragile government that appears as a benign autocracy but in reality is unable to exercise control over the country. A more negative outcome would involve a breakdown in governance to a point where the Iraqi state itself cannot be reconstituted, leading to a civil war and the emergence of a 'collapsed' rather than 'failed' state. It is interesting to note the assessment of the US's top diplomat for the Middle East, Edward P Djerejian, who led a study for the Bush administration on the failures of American public diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim worlds:

'The long range picture is this: even if Iraq looks messy and violent, if in the end there is a government that shares power with the major groups in the country, the end game can be positive. But if it goes the other way, it will be viewed by history as a destabilising event that not only didn't bring security, but caused instability, and set back the key goals we are trying to achieve on the Arab-Israeli front, on energy security, and certainly on democratizing the region.'⁷⁸

The former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has assessed that the latter option is the more realistic, concluding that Iraq has all the makings of a failed state and that it is in Israeli state interest to support the Kurds, to have some leverage over this unstable outcome. He reportedly told the US Vice President that the size of US 'humiliation' was the only factor that US policy-makers were now capable of controlling.⁷⁹ That, and perhaps exerting some influence over the way in which Iraq is dismantled. Thus, the soft state scenario may well be seen as a stepping-stone that marks the pathway to strategic failure in Iraq.

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What are the costs of strategic failure for Iraq and the region? If democratic efforts fail, a US administration that views international relations through the prism of *realpolitik* would argue that only a pro-Western repressive regime will act as a buffer against state collapse and consolidation of terrorist groups in Iraqi territory that would then seek to destabilize neighbouring states such as Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. A pro-Western puppet regime ruled through coercion rather than popular consent would ultimately fail, and be swept aside by an even more radical and fundamentalist alternative than the one the imposition of such a regime sought to avoid. The lessons of Iran are clear on this account. Thus, any attempt to avoid strategic failure in the short term would almost certainly only delay the process, rather than avert it.

With an insurgency – which some have labelled a *de facto* civil war - currently being fought within a Saudi Arabia already beset by a looming succession crisis, failure in Iraq could tip the balance away from more liberal tendencies within the royal family and in favour of the hard line clerical religious minority and their supporters within the royal family (such as Prince Nayef, Minister of Interior). The Saudi government has supported the clerical establishment, whose approval is indispensable to the legitimacy of the ruling regime. This has represented a structural barrier to undertaking reform. As a result, the government is increasingly unable to combat violence and to unite competing factions within the state: the state's coercive apparatus, particularly the *mukhabarat* – the intelligence services – with personal and tribal links and sympathies to bin Laden's cause, is not considered trustworthy and national identity in Saudi Arabia is coming under increasing strain.⁸⁰ Although since 12 May 2003 the Saudi authorities have fought back against al Qaeda terrorists in the kingdom, strategic failure in Iraq would represent a very serious setback to the success of these efforts. Saudi Arabia would have a neighbour that provides safe transit, safe havens and a launch-pad from which terrorist operations could occur. Consolidated Iraqi terrorist networks would be more able to link with Saudi counterparts to effectively attack vulnerable oil and gas production, processing (at Ras Tanoura and Abqaiq, for example) and distribution infrastructure, crippling confidence in the economy and sustainability of Saudi Arabia. Iraqi collapse heightens the danger to Saudi Arabia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and as a consequence consolidates its strategic partnership with the US, promoting a strategic environment in which even incipient reform efforts are strangled at birth.

The drift of Iraq into barely managed or contained instability would further strengthen conservative power elites in Iran.⁸¹ On the domestic front the conservative Iranian establishment would present Iraq as a case study in the dangers of regime change and contrast the instability and anarchy that flows from too rapid a change with the stability underpinned by the continuation of the status quo. The conservative mantra - 'hold onto nurse for fear of something worse' - would be reinforced and moderate democratic forces in Iran further undermined and marginalized. In foreign policy, the elimination of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein and the emergence of less coherent and less stable states to the west and east have served to enhance Iran's regional superpower status and consolidate its geopolitical gains. Iran is able to shape the Iraqi domestic political landscape through its ties to and support through arms, propaganda, and intelligence agents to Iraq's Shia communities: the consolidation of Shia satellites would provide Iran with leverage over the pace and direction of Iraqi state development. This advantage would be buttressed by the increased unlikelihood that the US could engineer pre-emptive regime change against a so-called 'axis of evil' state that has a secretive nuclear programme and that is alleged to have operational links to al

Qaeda.⁸² Indeed, one lesson Iran might draw from the Iraqi debacle is that a drive to generate WMD would serve as a deterrent to US-led military intervention, rather than a casus belli, so increasing pressure for WMD acquisition.

A failed and anarchic Saudi Arabia and a nuclear Iran are likely outcomes, undercutting, to say the least, the emergence of a benign environment within which pressure for reform under the framework of the US promotion of democracy through its 'Broader Middle East Initiative' could unfold. Strategic failure in Iraq would act as a catalyst for the further destabilization or radicalization of the Islamic and Arab world⁸³ and so strengthen the growth in power and ability of terrorist groups worldwide. It could give terrorist groups a centre for global operations. The ideologies that underpin terrorist actions would receive a massive legitimacy boost and Iraq would for the first time become a centre for training and recruitment and a base from which to destabilise regimes elsewhere.

The former head of the CIA operation to track bin Laden has argued that the invasion of Iraq was 'an avaricious, premeditated, unprovoked war against a foe who posed no immediate threat. There is nothing that bin Laden could have hoped for more than the American invasion and occupation of Iraq.'⁸⁴ Senator Chuck Hagel, an influential moderate Republican from Nebraska, has argued that the war in Iraq appears to have hurt America in its battle against terrorism: 'This put in motion a new geographic dispersion. It's harder to deal with them because they're not as contained. Iraq has become a training ground.'⁸⁵

Strategic Failure & The Transatlantic Alliance

If in the Middle East the impact of strategic failure can be argued as entirely negative in character, what might be the implications and consequences of such failure for cooperation within the transatlantic security community? Whilst it is premature and so foolhardy to predict with any certainty the impact of catastrophic strategic failure in Afghanistan and Iraq upon transatlantic relations, it is at least possible to begin to chart the likely nature of the debate that would ensue and on that basis at least, to point broadly to possible outcomes.

It is clear that these two interventions have already impacted upon transatlantic relations and our perception of the utility and function of NATO both directly in the case of Afghanistan through its lead of the peacekeeping effort and indirectly in the case of Iraq, through the activities of the majority of its member states. In Afghanistan, the NATO-led ISAF struggles to deploy troops and maintain sufficient stability to allow for the first elections since the fall of the Taliban in October 2001. 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' is not a NATO operation. Nevertheless failure in Iraq would have serious implications for NATO, given that 16 of the 26 NATO nations are committed, not least US, UK and Poland (whose multi-national division NATO supports). NATO at its Istanbul Summit offered to train Iraqi military and security services personnel.⁸⁶

Given that NATO, the most effective and durable military alliance in history according to its supporters, leads ISAF in Afghanistan and failed to reach consensus over intervention in Iraq - what might be the impact of strategic failure on two fronts for the alliance? The most optimistic reading would be to argue that strategic failure leads to the strategic renewal of the organization: NATO matches the rhetoric of its ambition with reality. Consensus is reached over the necessity of transforming NATO from a Cold War symmetric, linear, reactive and defensive

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alliance into a truly post-9/11 proactive, more agile, smaller but more able organization. Progress already achieved following the transformational agenda highlighted at the NATO Prague Summit of 2002 (the Prague Capabilities Commitment) and reconfirmed at the Istanbul Summit of June 2004 is built upon. The command structure is made lighter still, the NATO Response Force – an idea a year ago, now operationally effective – then becomes fully global, deployable anywhere in the world in a classical reactive manner, as well as proactively, preventively and perhaps even pre-emptively. The alliance is further reformed at the higher end of military capability (strategic airlift capacity, refuellers etc.), downsized to become more competitive and better able to project its influence and ‘market share’ through out the world, to use a business analogy.

On this reading, the political appetite and ambitions of NATO member states are at last matched by a willingness to commit the necessary resources and force generation. Arguments, for example over the necessity of bridging technological gaps and disparities,⁸⁷ or over how best to ensure the operational effectiveness and sustainability of deployed NATO troops and assets abroad, are settled and reform implemented. A larger common budget is created. An agreement with the EU on a division of global policing labour along functional or geographic lines is reached. The US could agree to undertake war fighting, NATO to handle the immediate post combat operations and the EU prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation operations. Alternatively, a regional distribution of labour might be agreed: NATO’s response force goes global, the EU polices the Balkans and Africa.⁸⁸ The 2.4 million European military forces are transformed, with new emphases on identifying forces, capabilities and assets that can undertake stabilization and reconstruction efforts.⁸⁹

For this optimistic scenario to unfold, there is an assumption that must be realised: that NATO as an institution and its member states are capable of critical self-examination, of addressing the systemic, structural, institutional and politico-military weaknesses and errors that led to such catastrophes. On the basis of an honest and no-holds barred re-assessment, NATO begins to implement lessons learned, beginning with an acceptance that the transatlantic alliance does not have the right mix of forces to combat terrorist-sponsoring states and failed states. However, this paper argues that the likelihood of strategic failure is now greater than strategic success. In essence, the impact of the poppy harvest in Afghanistan and the ‘Kurdish question’ in Iraq will render ISAF and the multinational coalition largely impotent in the face of these dominant dynamics, able only to conduct the orchestra as these modern-day Titanics slowly slide beneath the waves.⁹⁰

What, then, is the more likely reaction of the Euro-Atlantic security community given strategic failure on two fronts? From the outset it is clear that NATO member states are not ‘bound to cooperate’ militarily in the Middle East.⁹¹ Indeed, as NATO members have hitherto demonstrated little inclination to address and rectify fundamental weaknesses in organization and structure, we can argue that their mutual impulse is rather towards blame shifting and recrimination. The divisions exposed in the run up to the Iraq war as diplomatic efforts failed to gain transatlantic strategic consensus would be amplified.

In response to US finger pointing, or even pre-emptively, some European NATO member states will assert it was the gratuitous arrogance and ineptitude of the ‘coalition of the willing’ rather than the good sense of NATO which ‘lost Iraq’. Where the US acts without NATO failure follows, will be the refrain. The Achilles heel of US conventional military forces will have been exposed – their inability to fight a

counter-insurgency campaign effectively – insulating European militaries from some US criticism of their effectiveness. Indeed, the NATO Secretary General, sharply critical of the Bush administration for abandoning NATO as an alliance, has already noted: ‘If the mission defines the coalition, then you don’t need NATO. You will then see the Europeans falling into each other’s arms.’⁹² Once this Pandora’s box of blame and recrimination is opened, the disputes will intensify. European criticisms will include: a focus on the blindly ideological nature of the Bush administration’s approach to foreign policy (Project for the New American Century: Exhibit A); the US’ uses and abuses of intelligence to instigate an unwarranted war in Iraq; US manipulation of international law, the UN and the Geneva Conventions (Abu Ghraib: Exhibit B); and an inability or disinclination of the Bush administration to engage long-standing allies constructively (‘Freedom Fries’/‘Old Europe’ rhetoric: Exhibit C). In European eyes the US will have ‘exchanged its long-established reputation as the principal *stabilizer* of the international system for one as its chief *destablizer*’.⁹³ Such a debate in essence is highly charged and politicised, extremely bitter and ultimately self-defeating.

The US and other coalition allies would probably argue that it was the unwillingness of NATO to behave as if Afghanistan really was an Article 5 operation, which ‘lost Afghanistan’. ISAF’s ‘failure’ to fold US-led ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ and ISAF into one primary mission that embraces security, stability and reconstruction, will be viewed as a cardinal error. The failure of NATO to generate forces and resources to match the political ambition of the member states will also be cited as evidence of political failure – with examples to support the critique: as well as the difficulties over helicopter deployments, SACEUR and the NATO Secretary General struggled to deploy a field hospital and 36 personnel to keep Kabul International Airport operational round the clock, seven days a week. As Doug Bereuter, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Europe of the US House of Representatives Committee on International Relations noted on June 15 2004:

There are more than two million military personnel in the forces of the European NATO allies, yet only 2% of those forces are deployed on NATO missions in Afghanistan and the Balkans. The NATO allies have promised to make more than 1,000 infantry companies available for NATO missions. They have promised to make more than 2,000 helicopters available for NATO missions. They have promised to make almost 300 transport aircraft available for NATO missions. Yet, for the mission in Afghanistan, the allies seemingly cannot find a few more infantry companies, cannot find a few more helicopters, and cannot find a few more transport aircraft that are essential to avoid failure. This is a failure of political will, pure and simple. It is a failure that jeopardizes the success of the mission in Afghanistan and jeopardizes the very credibility of the Alliance.⁹⁴

Even when forces were generated, national caveats (that is, the ability of member states to determine the role and mission of their contributions) will be cited as a key factor that undermined ISAF’s operational effectiveness (not to mention the limitations such caveats placed upon the effectiveness of the Polish multinational division in Iraq). The cancer of national caveats will be perceived as symptomatic of the failure of member states to trust the organization and the ISAF commanders.⁹⁵ The US civilian and military leadership would be well positioned to argue that the combination of these factors rendered ISAF ineffective and led directly to the loss of Afghanistan. Indeed, fear of NATO’s politico-military ineffectiveness, as demonstrated by the debacle in Afghanistan, would be posited as the very reason

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why a 'coalition of the willing' was used in Iraq. The US reply to the Secretary General's criticism will be: institutions that do not transform will be bypassed by coalitions that meet the requirements. Stalemate.

This debate and the divisions it highlights will be played out in the corridors of Brussels, Washington, London, Paris and Berlin – and irrespective of the merits of the arguments, NATO loses. The unfolding potential of strategic failure will feed into US foreign policy thinking, reinforcing existing trends in both the Republican and Democratic parties. It is possible that if President Bush is re-elected, he will adopt the position he campaigned on in 2000: that is, a 'modest' and isolationist foreign policy, as a reaction against the setbacks to US pre-eminence in the international system. Strategic failure in Afghanistan and Iraq will not provoke a widespread effort to create a multi-polar world and the US will maintain its hegemonic influence. But a more nuanced effort at selective engagement, a reassertion of the tradition of self-restrained diplomacy and a realization of the institutionalized nature of US power (the multilateral and self-binding nature of its foreign policy underpinned by deep interdependence and shared values) will change the tone and substance of US foreign policy.

But a continuation of current policies, which logically would allow for the pre-emptive use of force to enable regime change in Iran in President Bush's second term cannot be discounted. Senator Kerry, if elected President, appears set on a 'forward-leaning realist foreign policy: that is, a determination to concentrate on threats against US national interests narrowly defined – strategic choke points and oil.'⁹⁶ In either case, in substance if not in style NATO will be most useful in US eyes as a 'toolbox' (that is, a reinforcement of the à la carte approach): its assets militarily useful, but politically dead unless and until the foundational consensus principle is amended to allow some form of qualified majority voting to sanction NATO operations. A key question still remains to be addressed: if the template of 'coalitions of the willing' adopted in the Afghan and Iraq operations can be said to have contributed to strategic failure, what is their utility? How might such coalitions be created and utilized in such a way that success unfolds? Does the political legitimacy generated by such coalitions more than compensate for the military incompatibilities and sub-optimal effectiveness they generate?

The marginalization of NATO will impact on the EU's European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and its power relative to the US. One analyst has noted: 'As investors shift their holdings into euro-dominated assets America's heavy dependence on inflows of foreign capital could become a major source of instability'.⁹⁷ Arguably, in the diplomatic build-up to the war in Iraq, the divisions and tensions between those key European NATO member states that opposed US-led intervention had the unintended consequence of breaking the log-jam within the EU over the scope, nature and role of ESDP and how that was to be best realised. Intense diplomatic discussions over Iraq made explicit hitherto implicit competing agendas and ambitions that had hindered progress: not least, the balance between civil and military elements in ESDP, the US-EU divide and the scope of ESDP.⁹⁸ This process was further promoted by the operationalization of ESDP in 2003: the EU Police Mission in Bosnia in January; 'Operation Concordia' in FYROM in March and 'Operation Artemis' in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in June 2003.

The EU may find itself having to undertake a larger role in conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation operations, and to consider more seriously developing capabilities to achieve high end Petersberg peace-enforcement operations, or at least the ability to dovetail into a deployment after 'coalitions of the willing' have

carried out war fighting. Similar marriages of convenience would then logically be arranged between the overlapping memberships of the EU, OSCE, Council of Europe and UN in the EU's 'near neighbourhood' in post-communist space, and equivalent regional and sub-regional organizations and institutions in the Mediterranean region and the Middle East.

Conclusions: Security Governance & Global Stability?

In Afghanistan, the danger of the reestablishment of neo-Taliban forces and narco-terrorists would have a profound impact. It would destabilise the whole region, boost trans-national terrorist groups and increase the number and viciousness of mass casualty attacks in the Euro-Atlantic region. In the case of Iraq, there may be two outcomes: the state collapses after a civil war and becomes a failed state in which terrorists can operate at will against regional leaderships and the Euro-Atlantic region; alternatively, the interim government avoids civil war only through the suppression of liberties and democratic impulses, allowing the emergence of either an anti-western tyranny (the sub-Saddam outcome) or a pro-western repressive regime hated by society and so unsustainable in the longer term. Current dynamics, indicators and trajectories in both states indicate that these outcomes, which constitute strategic failure, are more rather than less likely. Strategic failure will have a profound impact upon the balance of power in neighbouring states within these regions and so too on international relations. In particular, Iran will become consolidated as a regional superpower, whilst Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil producer, will become more vulnerable to anti-Western disruption and takeover.

States are increasingly placed under stress as they attempt to adapt to the opportunities and challenges posed by globalization. States are failing to maintain stability, political leaderships and regimes collapse and change. Such unintended or unprovoked 'regime change' may have negative consequences for US interests and the unintended nature of such change does not relieve the US of its perceived obligations. The cases of Afghanistan and Iraq have shown that the US and its allies are not structured to effectively manage the consequences of regime change, irrespective of whether it is instigated by US-led 'coalitions of the willing' or through the alliance. The design, doctrine, training and equipment of forces for future such tasks need to be transformed.

The experience of Iraq has also shed light on the nature of effective regime change, supporting the validity of elite theory (as opposed to liberal theory) of political transition. Here transitions can better be sustained when elites lose the ability to self-reproduce, allowing counter-elites to assume the mantle of power (essentially the lessons learned from the Soviet experience). Where internal counter-elites are unavailable or unwilling to assume power, regime change based on poorly legitimized émigré elites has much greater chances of failure, raising serious questions about whether or not it should even be attempted.⁹⁹ In turn this has implications for US Grand Strategy and an approach to foreign policy that rests on a belief in US exceptionalism and the power of US ideals and values (soft power) to change the nature of regimes and governance in states and regions in which a very different cultural, religious and historical development has unfolded. External military-led regime change can no longer be expected to serve as the handmaiden of imperial hubris or market-democratic universalism: ideology will become more divided from foreign policy than before; 'strategic adventures' will decrease.¹⁰⁰

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The existing divisions within the Euro-Atlantic security community over threat perceptions, the applicability of force and more importantly the fragmentation of a political consensus that allows for the (attempted) application of military solutions will become even wider, and perhaps unbridgeable. 'Thinking the unthinkable' now and preparing for it, accepting blame is to be shared and learning lessons for the future is a necessary first step to avoiding this outcome. Otherwise, 'out of area and so out of business' will become the new mantra, with the US reliant increasingly on militarily effective but politically weak 'coalitions of the willing' and the Europeans on a European army that will enjoy high levels of political support precisely because it will be unemployable in all but the softest of crises, or confined to conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation tasks, but not active peace-enforcement.

After the ending of the Cold War a key question facing the international community has been which global force would create the conditions for global peace and security: the United States, NATO, or the UN? Strategic failure in Afghanistan and Iraq will have rendered NATO less capable of achieving consensus and less willing to revisit and revise this foundational pillar. Although the US cannot and will not shrug off the burden of global leadership, the legitimacy of US-led 'coalitions of the willing' consisting of the majority of NATO member states will be weaker. The NATO family of nations will not have emerged triumphant over threats but rather broken, disillusioned and dazed.

The implications of such strategic failure for global peace and security will be profound. Will either NATO or a US-led 'coalition of the willing' be likely in the near future to intervene in sub-Saharan Africa – not least Darfur in Western Sudan – following such defeat? It is possible that a catharsis that follows this crisis may generate a greater international consensus over the legitimacy of humanitarian interventions, based on the duty of functioning states to 'protect the innocent' where clear and compelling cases of massacre, starvation, or government induced genocide are unfolding. Alternatively, further mass casualty attacks within the Euro-Atlantic region could have the same effect. It may well be that on either basis some sort of rapprochement or realignment within the transatlantic security community can be brokered. If not, the nature and role of transatlantic foreign interventions to provide stabilization, support good governance and manage sources of insecurity will have been undermined: the costs of strategic failure will not just be measured in terms of treasure and blood in the West.

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Want to Know More ...?

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