



Sustainable Security in Afghanistan

Crafting an Effective and Responsible Strategy for the Forgotten Front

Lawrence Korb, Caroline Wadhams, Colin Cookman, and Sean Duggan

March 2009

Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

The Obama administration inherits a rapidly deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. In fact, both President Obama and General David McKiernan, who commands all U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan, agree that we are not winning the war against the Taliban and other insurgent groups.¹ Facing facts on the ground is a prerequisite to responding to this challenge, which will require a comprehensive and long-term approach that uses all elements of U.S. national power.

Ever since the United States began planning to invade Iraq in early 2002, Afghanistan became the “Forgotten Front” for U.S. policymakers—an under-resourced, under-manned, and under-analyzed “economy of force” operation that was limited to seeking out and killing surviving Taliban, Al Qaeda and other transnational terrorist groups. As a result, critical political and economic reforms to ensure the country recovered from the extremist Taliban regime and decades of war were neglected. This chronic and unacceptable neglect has led to a resurgent Taliban, a fierce insurgency, a weak Afghan government tainted by corruption and incompetence, a booming opium trade, and an increasingly disillusioned Afghan people.

Despite some initial success by the United States and its coalition partners after the 2001 invasion, the Taliban, Al Qaeda and other insurgent groups are now stronger than at any time since the 9/11 attacks on the United States, operating out of neighboring Pakistan and Afghanistan and making key inroads in both countries. From both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border, these extremist groups continue to threaten the safety of the United States, its allies, and the stability of South Asia.

Responding to this challenge will require a comprehensive, sustainable approach that uses all elements of U.S. national power—military, economic, and diplomatic. Given declining American and European support for the war in Afghanistan, the strategy must be not only effective but convincing, too. In a U.S. poll taken in mid-March, 42 percent of the respondents said the United States made a mistake in sending military forces to Afghanistan, up from 30 percent just a month before and from 6 percent in January 2002.² Europeans are even more skeptical, with majorities in Germany, Britain, France, and Italy opposing increased troop commitments to the conflict.³

We are not winning
the war against the
Taliban and other
insurgent groups.

During the presidential campaign and since taking office, President Obama and top administration officials have signaled that Afghanistan is a top foreign policy priority. Now, after years of policy drift in Afghanistan under the Bush administration, President Obama is in the process of conducting a comprehensive review of its policies toward Afghanistan and Pakistan, the results of which are expected to be released in time for the 60th anniversary NATO summit in Strasbourg, France, on April 4, 2009. In the meantime, the president in February decided to deploy an additional 17,000 troops to Afghanistan by the summer, bringing the total number of U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan to 55,000, or about one-third the level in Iraq.⁴ This early decision was required for the additional troops to deploy in time for the country's presidential elections in August and the beginning of Afghanistan's fighting season.

Absent that comprehensive strategy from the Obama administration on how to reverse the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, political analysts and organizations from across the political spectrum are concerned that the decision to send more troops could ensnare the United States and its allies in a quagmire akin to the experience of the Soviet Union in the 20th century and the British the century before. Some of these analysts question the need for further troop deployments to Afghanistan, calling for more limited goals in the country, with a few recommending that the United States and its allies bypass the national government in Kabul entirely for more direct relationships with local, provincial, and tribal elements. Facing an economic crisis at home and other global challenges, some members of the Obama administration have signaled that they might aim for limited goals as well.⁵

Indeed, any strategy to recapture the initiative in Afghanistan must be acutely aware of Afghanistan's long history of fragmentation and armed resistance to outside powers who seek to influence its political makeup. U.S. goals and strategy must proceed with a sense of humility and recognition that even our best efforts may not succeed. This is why we at the Center for American Progress recommend that the Obama administration's strategic review answer five fundamental questions:

- What is the scale of our objectives in Afghanistan?
- What is the time frame for U.S. engagement?
- What is the right balance of civilian and military assets to be sent to the country?
- How do we increase the capacity and willingness of the government of Pakistan to prevent their country from being used as a staging ground for attacks against our forces in Afghanistan?
- And most fundamentally, is a sustained military, political, and economic effort in Afghanistan still in our national interest?

In answering these questions, U.S. policymakers must bear in mind the consequences of American disengagement from Afghanistan after the Soviet defeat and the subsequent rise of the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Policymakers also must consider the dangers

still posed by international terrorist organizations based in the region today, the threat posed to neighboring Pakistani by sub-state militant groups, and the risks for the region should the country descend into civil war and warlordism once again. Therefore, the Center for American Progress believes that vital U.S. interests will be served if we can:

- Ensure that Afghanistan does not again become a launching pad for international terrorism
- Prevent a power vacuum in Afghanistan that would further destabilize Pakistan and the region
- Prevent Afghanistan from being ruled by extreme elements of the Taliban and other extremist groups.

Nor are these the national security interests of the United States alone. Speaking at the North Atlantic Council, Vice President Joseph Biden recently noted that “It was from [Afghanistan] that Al Qaeda plotted 9/11. It was from that very same area that extremists planned virtually every major terrorist attack in Europe since 9/11, including the attacks on London and Madrid.”⁶

The Pakistanis also share these interests. While sections of the Pakistani military and political establishment have aided Islamic militant groups based in Afghanistan and its ungoverned border region as a supposed counterweight against its strategic rival India, Pakistan has suffered serious blowback against its own territorial and political integrity as these groups have attacked institutions within Pakistan, sought to establish their own parallel governments within Pakistani territory, and raised the risk of pulling Pakistan into direct conflict with India through repeated terrorist attacks.

While several allied countries have made serious military and economic commitments in Afghanistan to date—among them Great Britain, Canada, and the Netherlands—the shared nature of the threat requires a broader, more intensive, and better-coordinated response from the international community. This increased effort will be required of Pakistan, NATO, and the 15 other countries that currently contribute 32,000 troops to the U.N.-mandated and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force. If NATO members are unable or unwilling to contribute more combat troops then the administration should ask them to provide more trainers, aid, and equipment. The Obama administration also must take a regional approach to engage all of Afghanistan’s neighbors, including India, Russia, China, and Iran.

But creating an effective strategy in Afghanistan to achieve U.S. national interests is not just about rallying other nations to the cause. The Obama administration must distinguish between short-term goals to stabilize conditions on the ground in Afghanistan over the next 18 months and sustainable intermediate and long-term goals that will allow the United States and its allies to one day leave Afghanistan as a stable, functioning nation in control of its borders and with a government respected by its people.

Vital U.S. interests
are at stake in
Afghanistan and
the region.

Sustainable security in Afghanistan: The key policy goals

Two paramount national security interests of the United States are to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a safe haven for terrorists and to ensure the deteriorating security situation there does not envelop the surrounding region in a broader power struggle. Doing so will require a prolonged U.S. engagement using all elements of U.S. national power—diplomatic, economic, and military—in a sustained effort that could last as long as another 10 years.

Recognizing that a stable political environment and viable Afghan economy cannot exist in today's chaotic security environment, the United States and its allies must sequence their goals, recognizing that creating a modest level of security will be the linchpin for achieving its intermediate and long-term diplomatic and economic objectives. Specifically:

Short-term goals over the next 18 months

- Prevent Afghanistan from being used as a safe haven for terrorist and extremist groups with a global reach to attack the United States, its allies, and its interests
- Prevent a security vacuum in Afghanistan from destabilizing Pakistan and the region
- Couple efforts to stabilize Afghanistan with a parallel, integrated strategy for Pakistan, with a particular focus on helping Pakistanis build a stable civilian government committed to working toward the elimination of terrorist safe havens within its territory

Intermediate policy goals over the next three to five years

- Promote a viable Afghan economy that offers realistic opportunities for the Afghan people
- Sharply curb the poppy trade in Afghanistan and the region
- Promote democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in Afghanistan and the region
- Resolve or at least reduce regional tensions, particularly between Pakistan and its neighbors, which frequently spill over into Afghanistan

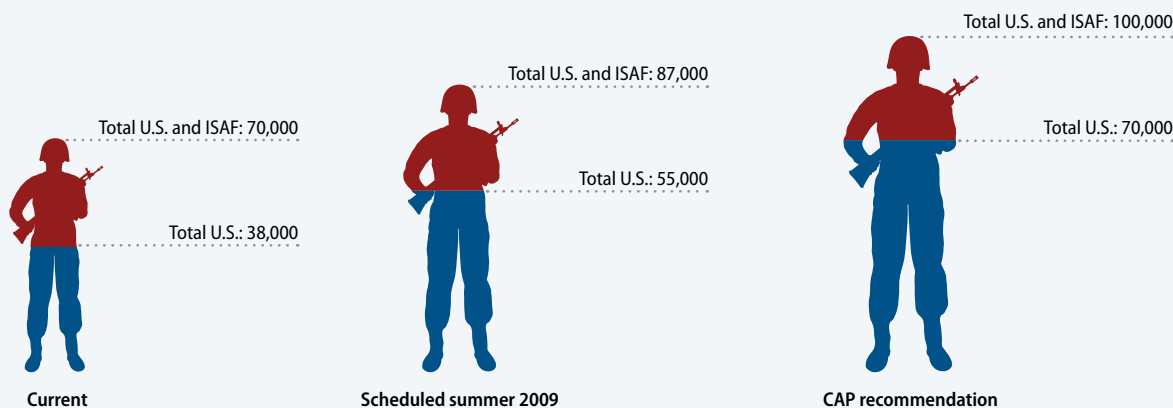
Long-term policy goals over the next 10 years

- Assist in creating an Afghan state that is able to defend itself internally and externally, and that can provide for the basic needs of its own people
- Prepare for the full military withdrawal from Afghanistan alongside continued diplomatic and economic measures to promote the sustainable security of Afghanistan

These goals cannot be achieved with the current level of resources and lack of coordination. The Bush administration attempted to fight and build Afghanistan on the cheap and committed too few troops and resources to it from the beginning. The problem is not that the Bush administration's effort in Afghanistan failed. The problem is that it was never given a chance to succeed.

Troop commitments

Numbers of U.S. and ISAF troops in Afghanistan



Military commitment

The addition of 17,000 U.S. combat troops and military support personnel by summer 2009—bringing U.S. troops to 55,000, their highest level to date—may be sufficient to freeze the security situation in Afghanistan for a while, but it is surely not enough to turn the tide. The United States must fulfill the request of General David McKiernan, the commander of the allied International Security Assistance Force, for an additional 15,000 U.S. troops, bringing the number of U.S. forces to 70,000, or about half the level in Iraq. This increase must include troops for combat as well as mentor teams for the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police to fill critical gaps in the training effort. (See chart, opposite, for numbers of U.S. and ISAF forces in Afghanistan.)

Together with the 32,000 coalition troops already there, this increase will bring international forces to about 100,000—a nearly 300 percent increase over the average force level for the period from 2002 to 2007. This force level will most probably need to be sustained in the short-term to intermediate term as Afghanistan’s army and police forces become more capable and ready.

Economic commitment

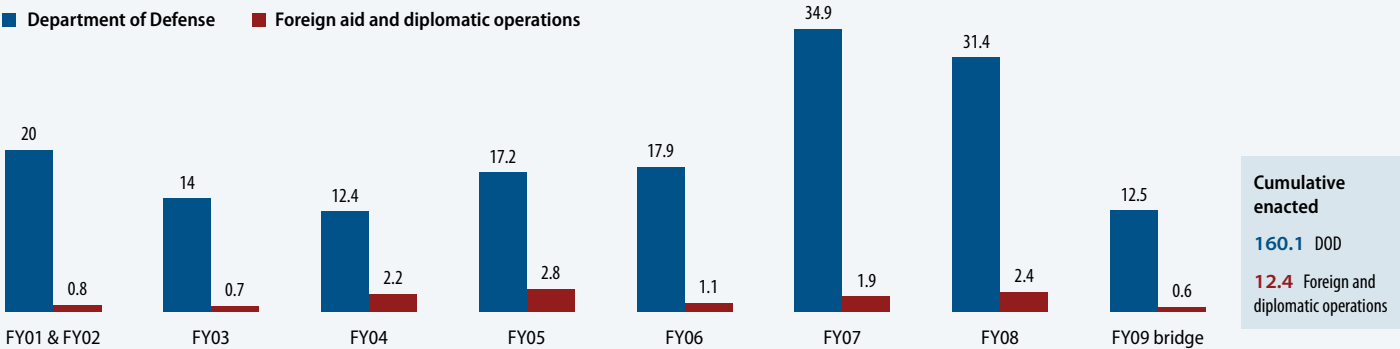
From 2002 through the first half of fiscal year 2009, which ends in September, the United States has committed a little over \$170 billion dollars to the effort in Afghanistan. But only 7 percent of these funds were committed to foreign aid and diplomatic operations, with the remaining 93 percent allotted to Department of Defense operations. (See chart below.)

This imbalance must be corrected. According to the Obama administration’s fiscal year 2010 budget, the United States will save approximately \$330 billion from reduced combat missions in Iraq over the next five fiscal years.⁷ About \$25 billion of this savings should be redirected each year to pay for the increased U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan, and up to \$5 billion per year should be redirected to increase U.S. foreign aid and diplomatic operations—roughly twice as much as the amount of foreign and diplomatic aid that has been provided to Afghanistan in any year since 2002.

Strict oversight and Afghan government accountability is fundamental to improving the effectiveness of this increased aid (see page 26 for more on anti-corruption efforts).

Misaligned spending

The war in Afghanistan is overwhelmingly a Department of Defense operation, to the detriment of our economic and diplomatic efforts



Source: Congressional Research Service.

Military force alone
is not sufficient to
create the conditions
necessary to achieve
sustainable security
for Afghanistan.

Over the next 18 months, reversing the deteriorating security situation throughout the country, particularly in the south and east of Afghanistan, will require increasing the total number of U.S. troops to 70,000 from 55,000 while maintaining the number of international troops at around 32,000. U.S. policymakers and military leaders must be aware that throughout their history Afghans have resisted large numbers of foreign forces on their soil, but today the situation is different. Nearly two-thirds of Afghans still support U.S. forces throughout the country. Moreover, support for the Taliban in the east and central parts of the country—where the U.S. presence is the largest—is only 6 percent and 17 percent, respectively, indicating that additional troops alongside better economic development aid and reconstruction can win further support among the Afghan people.⁸

These additional troops will help address the short-term security needs of combating the Taliban and other irreconcilable terrorist and militant groups in cooperation with Afghan forces, which at the same time will need more and better training. Fully capable Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army forces will be instrumental in creating the security conditions needed for Afghan security and political institutions to assume their responsibilities. A minimalist effort that seeks only to target identifiable terrorist figures through military or covert operations—the Bush administration’s approach—will fail without doing more to build more sustainable long-term security for the country, and thus will fail to make Afghanistan, the region, and the United States more secure in the long run.

But military force alone is not sufficient to create the conditions necessary to achieve sustainable security for Afghanistan. As President Obama said when he ordered the 17,000 troops to Afghanistan, “I am absolutely convinced that you cannot solve the problem of Afghanistan, the Taliban, the spread of extremism in that region solely through military means.”⁹ The insurgency in Afghanistan is a political, social, economic as well as a military problem, and ultimately, all the elements of U.S. national power—diplomatic, economic, and military—must be brought to bear in a comprehensive manner in order to achieve the long-term U.S. goal of an Afghanistan that is able to govern, defend, and sustain itself.

Effectively employing all elements of U.S. national power will require a restructuring of the U.S. national security apparatus and a renewed focus on our diplomatic and economic assets that have been allowed to atrophy in favor of more direct but ultimately unsustainable military-centric policy responses. Ultimately, eradicating the “infrastructure of jihad” and bringing an end to the chronic cycles of conflict that have made Afghanistan a regional powder keg and a haven for international criminal and terrorist networks will require working in partnership with a national representative Afghan government.

In the pages that follow, we will detail how we believe the United States can achieve these ends over the next 10 years (see box on page 4–5 for a brief summary of the recommendations in this report). We hope that President Obama’s internal review of his administration’s strategic plans for Afghanistan in prelude to the upcoming NATO summit in Strasbourg, France, next month will incorporate some of these recommendations.

U.S. interests and goals in Afghanistan and the region

The United States today faces profound global challenges alongside pressing domestic economic needs. Obama administration officials must make multiple hard choices on issues that their Bush administration predecessors largely chose to defer. This means President Obama and his top advisers need to look hard at all of its policy options.

Afghanistan, of course, is not the only country in the world suffering from political instability, poverty, and underdevelopment—problems that could well threaten our own nation's security interests. But Afghanistan stands out as the most critical case for sustained American military, economic, and political engagement. The administration needs to marshal both domestic and allied resources to address these dangers—in Afghanistan, in that region, and around the world precisely because they are increasingly eclipsing traditional interstate conflict as the primary international threat in the 21st century.

Afghanistan: A war of necessity

Unlike the war in Iraq, which was always a war of choice, the war in Afghanistan was and still is a war of necessity. Convincing the American people, our NATO allies, and the countries in the region why an increased effort in Afghanistan is essential to their vital security interests will be one of the most difficult challenges facing the new administration as it formulates its strategy for Afghanistan and the region. This list of reasons, however, is not difficult to draft.

Al Qaeda and its affiliates still pose a direct threat

Al Qaeda poses a clear and present danger to American interests and its allies throughout the world and must be dealt with by using all the instruments in our national security arsenal in an integrated manner. The terrorist organization's deep historical roots in Afghanistan and its neighbor Pakistan place it at the center of an “arc of instability” through South and Central Asia and the greater Middle East that requires a sustained international response.

Despite some setbacks, Al Qaeda and its affiliates have regained a strategic safe haven within Afghanistan and Pakistan. In his first annual threat assessment to Congress, Director of

National Intelligence Admiral Dennis Blair concluded that Al Qaeda's core organization in the Afghan-Pakistani border region remains the most dangerous component of the larger Al Qaeda network.¹⁰ Lieutenant General Michael Maples, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, put it even more bluntly, stating that Al Qaeda has regrouped in Afghanistan and that its presence there "has increased to levels unseen since 2001–2002."¹¹

In many ways, the threat from Al Qaeda and other groups is much more complicated today than it was in 2001, as Al Qaeda and its affiliated groups have become more decentralized and diffuse. According to Pakistani intelligence sources, Al Qaeda has adapted to the strikes against its command structure by shifting to "decentralized operations" under small but well-organized regional groups within Pakistan and Afghanistan.¹²

What's more, Al Qaeda has stated its intention to attack those it describes as the "near enemy"—the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan—as well as the "far enemy"—the United States, its western allies, and Israel. The U.S. intelligence community believes the group shares overlapping resources, tactics, and membership with other regionally-focused militant groups, thus acting as a force multiplier for terror operations throughout the region and the world.

A failed Afghanistan would threaten the stability of Pakistan and South Asia

The U.S. intelligence community has come to a consensus "that no improvement in security in Afghanistan is possible without progress in Pakistan,"¹³ but these agencies also agree that should the Afghan state fail, the stability and territorial integrity of Pakistan will be placed in jeopardy. Militant groups that Pakistani military and intelligence groups once regarded as malleable clients are now increasingly empowered and operating independently, threatening the state itself.

The regional power vacuum that followed the anti-Soviet campaign in the 1980s led to the rise of armed warlords and powerful mujahadeen leaders backed by neighboring states, including Pakistan, India, Russia, and Iran, all of whom engaged in sustained proxy fights that devastated the country and provided an ideal environment for extremist groups such as the Taliban and Al Qaeda to flourish. A withdrawal by the international community increases the danger of the dissolution of the still-nascent Afghan state and risks another outbreak of civil war among various insurgent groups.

Afghanistan's opium revenues fund regional and international terrorists

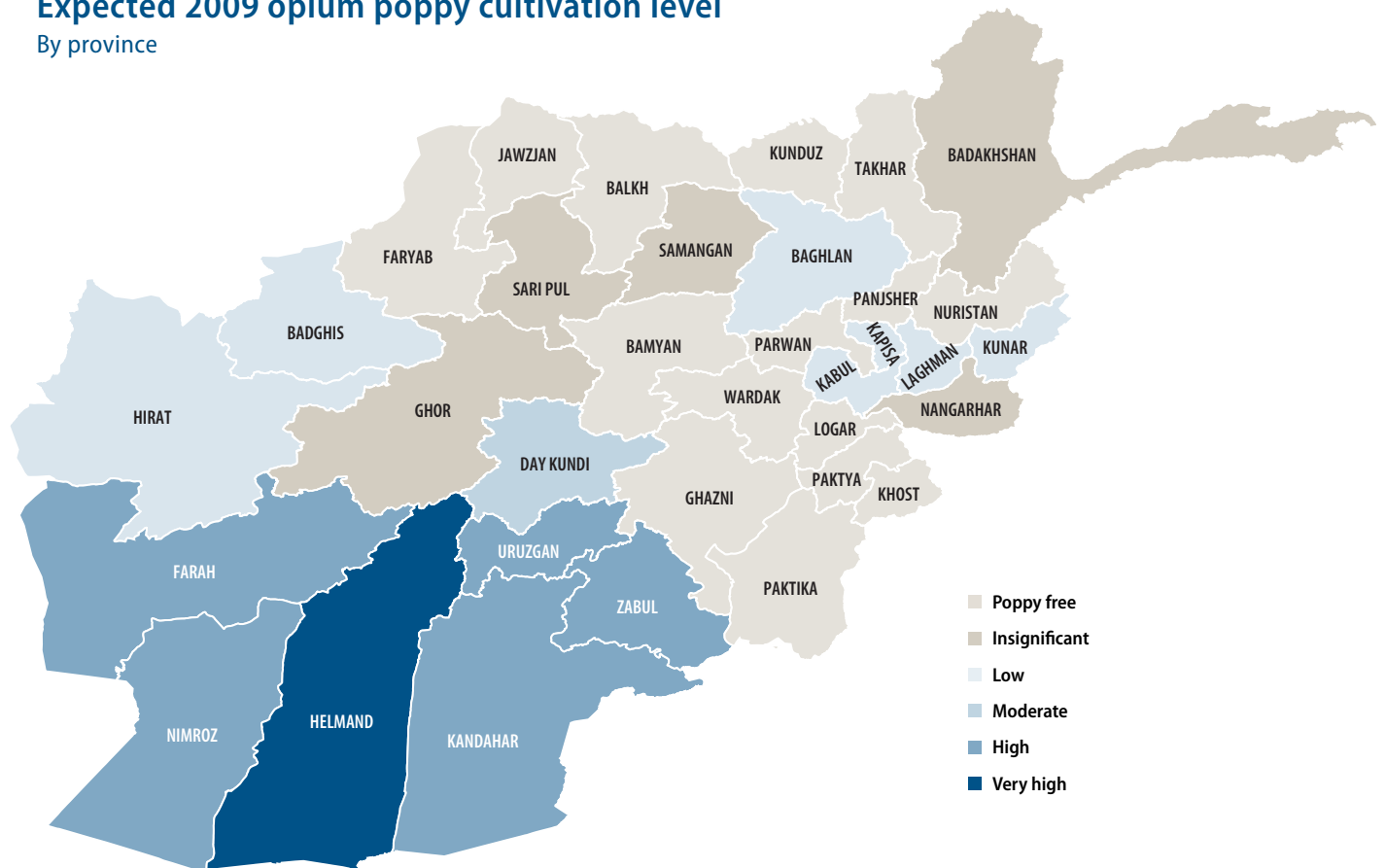
Militants use the unstable and ungoverned parts of Afghanistan to grow increasing amounts of poppy, which by some estimates now accounts for as much as half of the country's gross domestic product. Moreover, more than 93 percent of the world's opium is produced in Afghanistan.

The Taliban and other militant groups transport the poppy and opium abroad and use the revenues gained from drug trafficking to finance attacks against the United States and its allies in Afghanistan, Pakistan, South Asia, and around the world. This illicit drug trade also corrupts officials in the Afghan government, which further harms economic development and nation-building efforts in the country.

Moreover, the booming opium industry has fueled drug epidemics in Iran, Western Europe, and Russia, and has been a boon to criminal elements in those countries.¹⁴ More than 60 percent of Afghanistan's opium poppy crop is grown in the restive southern province of Helmand alone. The confluence of instability, poppy cultivation, and insurgent activity in Helmand is a testament to the interrelated nature of the problems facing Afghanistan.

Expected 2009 opium poppy cultivation level

By province



Source: MCN–UNODC Afghanistan Opium Rapid Assessment Survey, 2009 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/crop_monitoring.html).

Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Goals for the U.S. in Afghanistan and the region

The Obama administration's goals in Afghanistan are based upon several vital national security and foreign policy interests in the country and the region that will most likely require a sustained U.S. military, economic and diplomatic engagement in Afghanistan for many years to come. These goals must be broadened beyond military objectives for the United States to achieve a sustainable Afghanistan from which U.S. troops can be progressively withdrawn over time.

The Bush administration offered rhetorical support to building a strong central government in Afghanistan that would be capable of providing security and economic opportunity to the Afghan people, but it consistently failed to provide the resources and attention needed to accomplish either of these goals. In April 2002, President Bush stated he would provide Afghanistan with a Marshall Plan, but a detailed reconstruction plan was never presented to Congress.

Moreover, since 2001 U.S. support for reconstruction and humanitarian aid has averaged a little over \$1.5 billion a year. By some estimates even the Soviet Union spent more on reconstruction during its failed attempt to control Afghanistan than the Bush administration has spent in trying to rebuild it. We clearly have to do better.

From the beginning of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, our basic goals were centered on preventing Afghanistan from becoming a launching pad for terrorists to attack the United

Sustainable security in Afghanistan: a strategic timeline

Short-term policy goals—next 18 months

- Prevent Afghanistan from being used as a safe haven for terrorist and extremist groups with a global reach to attack the United States, its allies, and its interests
- Prevent a security vacuum in Afghanistan from destabilizing Pakistan and the region
- Couple efforts to stabilize Afghanistan with a parallel, integrated strategy for Pakistan, with a particular focus on building a stable civilian government committed to working toward the elimination of terrorist safe havens within its territory

Intermediate policy goals—next three to five years

- Promote a viable Afghan economy that offers realistic opportunities for the Afghan people

- Sharply curb the poppy trade in Afghanistan and the region
- Promote democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in Afghanistan and the region
- Resolve or at least reduce regional tensions, particularly between Pakistan and its neighbors, which frequently spill over into Afghanistan

Long-term policy goals—next 10 years

- Assist in creating an Afghan state that is able to defend itself internally and externally, and that can provide for the basic needs of its own people
- Prepare for the full military withdrawal from Afghanistan alongside continued diplomatic and economic measures to promote the sustainable security of Afghanistan

States, its allies, and its interests. Eliminating these terrorist influences ultimately will require the creation of a resilient Afghan government that can defend itself from internal and external threats and provide for the basic needs of its people. It also will require addressing political, security, and economic instability in Pakistan through a long-term and proactive partnership with the people and government of Pakistan based on regional diplomatic engagement, the reform of the Pakistani security services, and the strengthening of effective and representative civilian governance.

Recognizing that a stable government and viable Afghan economy cannot exist in today's security environment, the United States and its allies must sequence their goals, focusing immediately on achieving a modest level of security over the next 18 months. But that effort must be paired with an equally robust strategy of sustainable economic and political development, which will require linking short-term security goals to intermediate governance and economic goals over the next three to five years.

Ultimately, success in Afghanistan will depend on the ability of the United States and its coalition partners to enable and support an Afghan government and security force which are capable of providing for the basic economic, social, and security needs of its people. Such efforts should include supporting a growing economy, a functioning justice system, and an inclusive and representative government. The accomplishment of these long-term sustainable goals could require a continued American engagement for as long as 10 years, a fact of which the American people must be made aware.

Impediments to progress

The challenges that currently exist in Afghanistan to many analysts and experts appear to be intractable to many analysts and experts. Indeed, since the Center released its report “The Forgotten Front” in 2007, which warned of the catastrophic consequences of continuing to ignore Afghanistan, the window of opportunity for success in the country has closed rapidly. Last year was the deadliest on record for American troops, and fatalities in the first two months of 2009 are outpacing 2008 figures for a similar period.¹⁵

In addition, Afghan civilian casualties skyrocketed 40 percent in 2008—their highest since the beginning of the war.¹⁶ In 2008, the number of improvised explosive device attacks increased 45 percent, and the overall level of violence went up 33 percent.¹⁷ Some intelligence officials estimate that the government of president Hamid Karzai now controls approximately one-third of Afghan territory.¹⁸ In short, the list of challenges in Afghanistan is daunting and growing worse. The list includes:

The deteriorating security situation

Following the escape of senior Al Qaeda and Taliban leadership to the border areas of neighboring Pakistan in late 2001, these groups have successfully reconstituted themselves and are now conducting an increasingly deadly insurgency against the Afghan government and its international allies. In 2003, there were fewer than 50 U.S. casualties, fewer than 10 coalition casualties, and almost no suicide attacks in Afghanistan. In 2008, more than 150 U.S. servicemen and servicewomen lost their lives, in addition to 139 coalition troops.¹⁹

The insurgency is composed of a mix of groups, some of whom operate in close cooperation with other factions that have become increasingly separated from the core leadership. In addition to Al Qaeda, the principal actors include:

- The central shura of Mullah Omar and the original Afghan Taliban, believed to be based in Quetta, Pakistan, whose operations are focused in Helmand and Kandahar provinces
- Pakistani Taliban militant commanders in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas, or FATA, who frequently cross the Afghan border to conduct attacks on U.S. and coalition forces

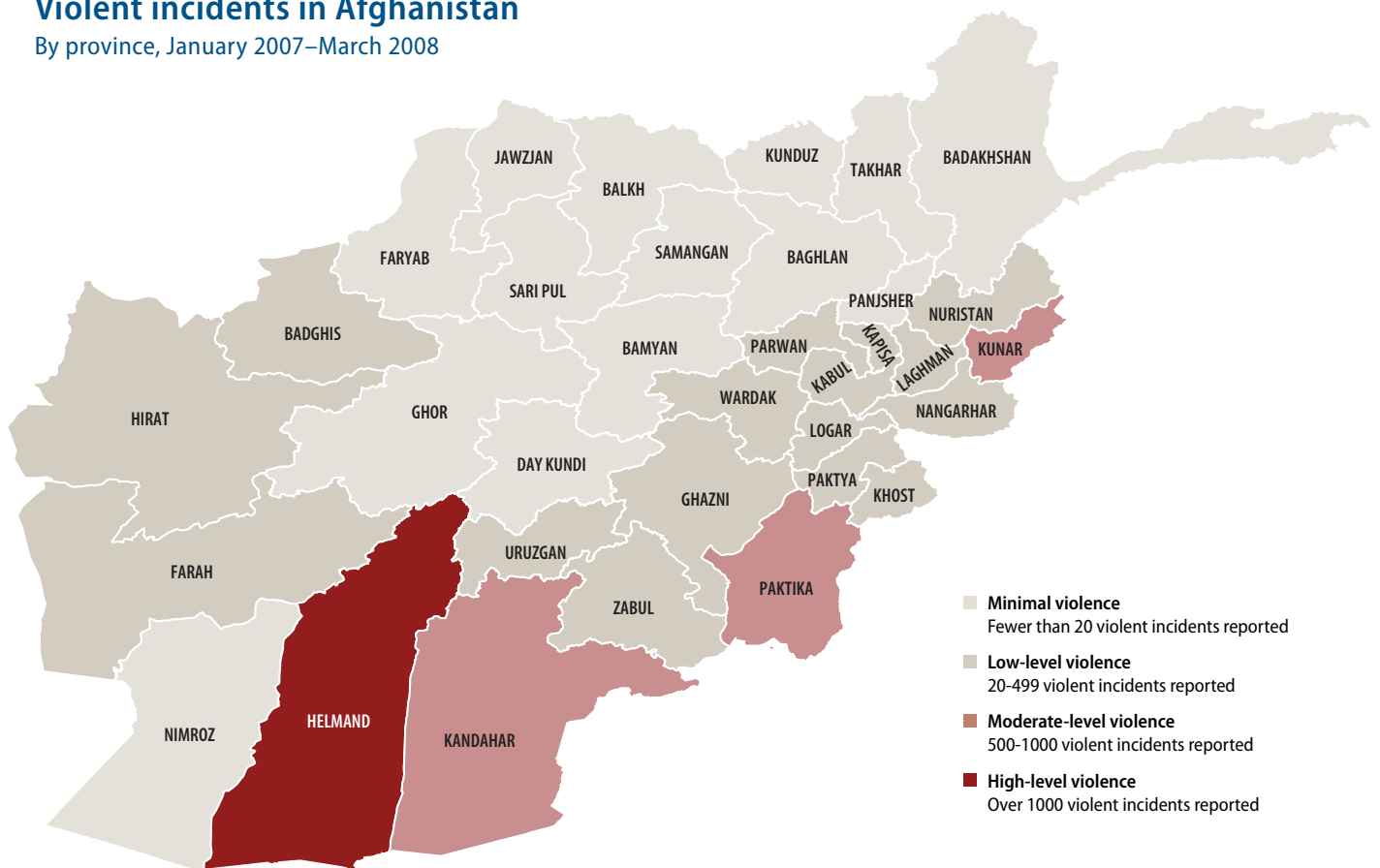
- The network of former anti-Soviet mujahadeen commander Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son Sirajuddin, based in the FATA, a group that allegedly still retains ties to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency
- The Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin party of former anti-Soviet mujahadeen commander Hekmatyar Gulbuddin, based in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan

Criminal elements, drug traffickers, and local warlords also are part of this combustible mix. While Al Qaeda represents the most pressing concern for the international community because of its transnational reach and focus, intelligence reports indicate a considerable degree of overlap and interoperability between them. In this way, Al Qaeda acts as a force multiplier sharing resources, recruiting bases, and to some extent goals.²⁰

The use of suicide bombing attacks and improvised roadside explosives in Afghanistan is indicative of this growing cooperation. These terrorist-style attacks rose dramatically over

Violent incidents in Afghanistan

By province, January 2007–March 2008



Source: Department of Defense, *Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, June 2008, p. 11

the past three years, causing the level of violence in the country to soar and casualties from improvised explosive device attacks increased by 146 percent in the first two months of 2009 compared to the levels a year prior.²¹

The effectiveness of these assaults is alarming. As of February 2009, 30 U.S. military personnel have died in Afghanistan, compared to just eight in the first two months of 2008. Since the conflict began in 2001, over 650 American military personnel have died.²²

What's more, Taliban fighters have carried out increasingly sophisticated assaults, not only in the movement's southern strongholds of Kandahar and Helmand provinces (see map on page 13), which up to now have been under the control of Canadian and British forces, but also in the heart of the country and the capital of Kabul.

Evidence of the Taliban's increasing power and influence include prominent assassination attempts on President Karzai, attacks on Western hotels in the heart of Kabul, and the targeted killing of foreign aid workers. These actions are part of a Taliban strategy to limit the ability of the government and international community to operate freely outside of heavily secured zones and to divide them from the people of Afghanistan.

These tactics, and U.S. and NATO efforts to respond to the rise in attacks, have led to a dramatic increase in the number of civilian casualties suffered by the Afghan people. A recent United Nations study found that 2,118 civilians were killed in 2008, a 40 percent increase over the previous year and the highest level of civilian deaths since the 2001 invasion.²³ Primarily because of the increasing and understandable unpopularity of NATO and U.S. air strikes, many Afghan leaders have become increasingly critical of the conduct of international military operations in the country—although it should be noted that violent insurgent attacks, particularly the proliferation of suicide bombings, still inflict the majority of civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

Recently announced efforts to better integrate Afghan security forces in the operational planning processes of the NATO command and in nighttime raids may help to decrease these incidents to an extent, but the patience of the Afghan people for taking continued casualties without tangible progress against the Taliban is clearly limited.^{24, 25} Afghan support for U.S. efforts in their country has declined to 63 percent today from 78 percent in 2006.²⁶

Logistical challenges

Increased international efforts in Afghanistan will have to deal with the severe stress being placed on the international community's supply routes through neighboring Pakistan. Beginning in the summer of 2008, Taliban militants in the country's northwest tribal areas and around Peshawar have conducted a series of increasingly deadly attacks on NATO

supply convoys and transportation infrastructure, destroying hundreds of trucks and shutting down the international highway linking Peshawar and Kabul on multiple occasions.²⁷

These attacks further compound the logistics problem posed by the February 2009 announcement by the government of Kyrgyzstan that the Manas Air Base, through which more than 15,000 troops and 500 tons of cargo pass monthly, would be closed down to NATO military traffic in mid-2009. Several reports suggest that the decision was in part instigated by Russia, which views a permanent U.S. presence in Central Asia with extreme suspicion. Russia allows the transit of non-military NATO supplies through its own territory and has offered rhetorical support for the U.S. effort there, but this is not sufficient. The recent opening of supply routes through Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan to transport nonmilitary goods may compensate for the loss of the Manas base and the pressure on the Pakistani routes to some extent, but the durability of those agreements is dubious.

Furthermore, the U.S. military as a whole remains a force under high stress after years of high-tempo operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Today, military materiel is seriously depleted and, more importantly, the readiness of our soldiers and Marines in particular is an issue of particular concern. Five of the Army's 43 active-duty combat brigades are on their fourth tour of duty in Iraq or Afghanistan, 15 others are on their third, and 16 others have had two tours of duty since 2002.

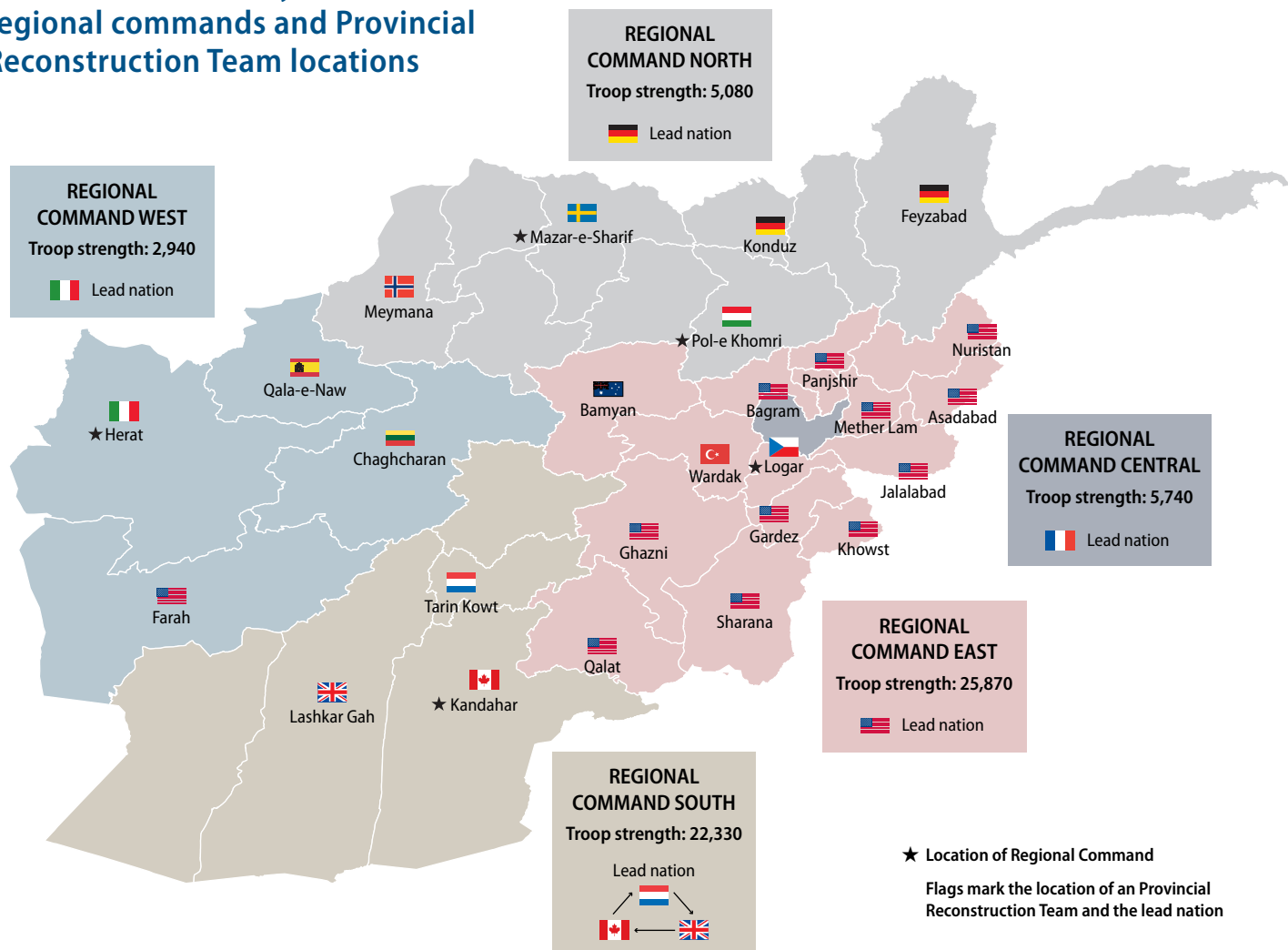
The stress of these continuous deployments has increased symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, divorce rates, and suicides among troops, and has posed a serious challenge for army recruiting efforts.²⁸ The cost of replacing the equipment destroyed or damaged from the wear and tear of continuous operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is estimated at as much as \$100 billion.²⁹ A continuing shortage of airlift capacity, both fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, plagues both the NATO alliance in Afghanistan and the U.S. military as a whole.

Lack of coordination with international allies and within the U.S. government

The shift to a NATO command structure for the U.N.-mandated International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF, in 2004 provided international legitimacy to the military operation in the country. Unfortunately, the alliance's first deployment outside of the European theater has exposed serious interoperability challenges and has sorely tested its capacity to carry out unified military and reconstruction operations. Put simply, the military operations and development efforts of the United States and its allies are not at all in sync.

Moreover, our NATO allies are themselves at odds with the United States and each other. There is limited public support in Europe and other countries for the mission—primarily because of the Bush administration's rhetorical linking of the war in Afghanistan to the

International Security Assistance Force regional commands and Provincial Reconstruction Team locations



Source: International Security Assistance Force.

war in Iraq. The capacity of NATO partners to carry out coordinated military operations in Afghanistan's more unstable regions, particularly in the south, also is limited by decades of European underinvestment in military force projection. What's more, the imposition of operational "caveats" on particular national forces limits the ability of ISAF commanders to respond coherently and effectively to the full range of challenges that face them.

Given the perceived lack of commitment by the United States and other partners, some nations, including Canada and the Netherlands, who are assigned to two of the most violent southern provinces, have set a timeline for withdrawal of their forces. This is further testing the endurance of the NATO alliance as a collective security organization.

Economic development efforts in Afghanistan are also fragmented. More than 60 donor countries and international organizations contribute to Afghan reconstruction and humanitarian efforts, with little or no coordination among them. The Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund, established in 2002 as a central pool from which international development pledges could be disbursed through the Afghan government, remains out of sync with the needs of the Afghan National Development Strategy. One of the most successful programs under ANDS for rural development and local-level governance-building has been the National Solidarity Program. Established in 2003 to develop the ability of Afghan communities to identify, plan, manage, and monitor their own development projects, this program works to empower rural communities to make decisions affecting their own lives and livelihoods.³⁰ Despite its successes, however, the program is facing a budget shortfall of as much as \$160 million.³¹

Even within the U.S. government, the lack of a unifying interagency strategy for Afghanistan has led to a duplication of efforts and a bifurcated civilian and military effort on the ground. The large disparities in budget authority given to the Pentagon compared to its civilian counterparts at the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and other agencies remain a big problem. Case in point: In fiscal year 2009, the ratio of funding for military forces versus non-military international engagement is 18 to 1.³²

Corruption and the illegal economy

Particularly worrisome for the international effort in Afghanistan is the steady decline in the Afghan public's perceptions that the government in Kabul is responsive to their needs and is concerned about their well-being. While support for a continued international presence remains high in the country, particularly in areas where international forces are stationed and where the Taliban are overwhelmingly seen as the biggest threat to Afghanistan, the Afghan government enjoys little support because of its inability to provide rule of law and services to meet the basic needs of its people.

Public polling in Afghanistan indicates that Afghan attitudes toward the Karzai government have progressively soured as the government fails to deliver the basic services and protections that ordinary citizens need to conduct their lives. A BBC/ABC News poll conducted in December 2008-January 2009 found that only 40 percent of Afghans believe the country is heading in the right direction, down from a high of 77 percent in 2005. In the same poll, 38 percent said the country was headed in the wrong direction, the highest level reported since the poll began in 2004.³³

While the security situation was the most commonly-cited reason for this assessment (52 percent), corruption and the poor state of the economy were second- and third-ranked causes (26 percent and 25 percent, respectively). Forty-eight percent rated the work of the Afghan government as “excellent” or “good,” compared to 80 percent in 2005, while another 48 percent gave the government a rating of only “fair” or “poor.”³⁴

To many Afghans, widespread corruption, bureaucratic ineptitude, and a lack of control over the international community's economic development actions within its borders make the Afghan government irrelevant at best and counterproductive at worst. The Karzai government continues to have little control or presence outside of Kabul and therefore cannot provide services and the rule of law in areas outside the capital. Indeed, even its presence within Kabul is beginning to deteriorate.

The Taliban and other extremist groups are eagerly exploiting these weaknesses. By setting up parallel government structures and intimidating the local population, the Taliban, local warlords, and criminal gangs are filling the void left by the central government. Consequently, the legitimacy of the Afghan government in the eyes of its people is steadily declining.

The spread of corruption at the national, provincial, and local levels is a cancer on efforts to rebuild the country, establish a rule of law after decades of war, and combat the rival political order that insurgent groups seek to establish. And closely linked to corruption is the illicit drug trade, which by some estimates accounts for more than half of Afghanistan's national GDP.³⁵

Afghanistan for several years now has produced well over 90 percent of the world's supply of heroin, the production of which is now highly concentrated in southern provinces where the insurgency reigns. Money that pours into the country as part of this illicit economy helps to fuel insurgent operations against the government, and funds criminal narco-trafficking groups. It also leads to corruption in the Afghan government, through the purchase of positions of power that can be used to profit from the drug trade, and rising addiction levels that sap the population's ability to rebuild their country.

Afghanistan's "comparative advantage in instability" makes it ideal for the illegal drug economy. Combatting the drug trade will not be possible, however, without parallel efforts to extend security, the writ of the government, and real economic infrastructure and markets that offer Afghans who grow the poppies that become opium and heroin some meaningful alternative livelihoods throughout the country.

A sustainable strategy in Afghanistan

A realistic strategy in Afghanistan must be based on the short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals for the country and the region, especially Pakistan—goals that recognize the constraints under which policymakers must operate. The United States must focus on achieving its short-term security and diplomatic goals within the next 18 months by stabilizing and then reversing the gains of the insurgents in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but these efforts must be linked to intermediate goals over the next three to five years that deliver sustainable political stability and economic prosperity to both countries.

Over the next 10 years, these broader sustainable security objectives need to take increasing precedence over military operations, though the two will go hand in hand for the next several years. Over time the deployment of the full range of U.S. economic and diplomatic power must come to dominate our strategy in Afghanistan so that our military forces there can be progressively withdrawn from the country.

Short-term policy recommendations

Protect the population and implement a counterinsurgency strategy

Protecting the Afghan population from the Taliban and its allies must be the core tenet of the U.S. military's counterinsurgency strategy and the foundation of the United States' short-term security goals. For the majority of the conflict's duration, the United States and international forces have primarily pursued a counterterrorism strategy that sought to hunt down and destroy Al Qaeda and other terrorists at the expense of leaving Afghan population centers undefended against Taliban influence.

A shortage of U.S. boots on the ground, national "caveats" that restrict the operations of many of our NATO allies, and an overall lack of attention were the main factors behind this misbegotten strategy. As Dutch Major General Mart de Kruif, who commands 23,000 NATO troops in southern Afghanistan noted recently, he is "out of troops" to provide security for the troubled south.³⁶ With U.S. and international forces conducting counterterrorism missions and not maintaining a constant presence, the Taliban does not have to hold or defend territory. The old military maxim that he who tries to control everything ends up controlling nothing applies here. This strategy must be reversed.

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In addition to hunting extremists, the United States should focus its efforts on providing the local population with better security as a way to gain cooperation, trust, and intelligence while buying time for coalition troops to recruit and train Afghan security forces. In doing so, coalition forces must isolate militants, create links with local people, and form relationships with tribes and clans in order to fill the vacuum left by the central government—a vacuum that is increasingly filled by the Taliban.

But in adopting counterinsurgency tactics, policymakers in the Obama administration and military planners must recognize that they do not have sufficient manpower to conduct a complete population-centric approach throughout the entire country. Ideally, the base ratio of counterinsurgents to host population that is required to be effective is one counterinsurgent for every 20 members of the population. But even if U.S. and international forces reach their highest levels at 85,000 troops by late summer 2009 and Afghan National Army and National Police forces reach their expected high of 216,000, these numbers are nowhere near what they must be to undertake a complete counterinsurgency throughout a country of approximately 32 million in the short-term term. A comprehensive counterinsurgency would require a force of more than 1 million.

Fortunately, the United States, its allies, and the Afghan government do not need to deploy additional forces equally throughout the entire country. Many areas of the country in the north and west are stable, requiring the presence of a limited number of coalition forces to help the Afghan government spread its security and political writ more effectively. According to General David McKiernan, U.S. and coalition forces are winning the battle to curb the Taliban in the north and northeast of the country.³⁷

That's why the coalition can concentrate the majority of the reinforcements on the turbulent areas of the south and east of the country—particularly in the Pashtun area, where the insurgency is growing in strength and influence. The south's largest cities, Kandahar and Lashkar Gah, make up 80 percent of the population of southern Afghanistan. Despite their strategic importance, no U.S. troops are currently deployed to either of these cities.³⁸ In 2006, when NATO forces began to deploy to the south, the British were assigned to Helmand province, the Canadians were assigned to Kandahar, and the Dutch were sent to Uruzgan, with little or no coordination between the three.³⁹

Additional coalition forces should therefore concentrate their military efforts in the volatile areas of the south and east of the country and coordinate their efforts with the Dutch, British, and Canadians, while employing other elements of U.S. national power in the calmer areas of the country. Even in the south and east of the country, though, U.S. sustainable development efforts need to begin as soon as the security situation allows, so that Afghans in these regions also experience the economic and political gains to be had working with coalition forces. For more on these strategies, please see our recent report “Swords and Ploughshares: Sustainable Security in Afghanistan Requires Sweeping U.S. Policy Overhaul.”⁴⁰



AP PHOTO/MUSADEQ SADEQ

Bring on the civilians

The United States, in the words of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen, must provide “a commensurate surge” of diplomats and civilian experts to train and increase the capacity of the Afghan government, reinforce stability operations, and oversee reconstruction. President Obama’s strategy review has indicated that he intends to sign an executive order to deploy more than 300 U.S. civilian diplomats, technical specialists and reconstruction advisors both in Kabul and throughout the country in an effort to rebalance U.S. civilian and military engagement.⁴¹ This is a good start.

Over the long term, President Obama notes that the United States must “build civilian national security capacity so that the burden is not continually pushed onto our military.”⁴² The current provincial reconstruction team, or PRT, model, which seeks to better integrate the civilian and military presence on the ground, remains heavily weighted toward military commanders with access to quick-processing Commander’s Emergency Response Program funds. USAID frequently lacks the resources to bring development assistance to bear in a timely and sustainable manner, and correcting this imbalance will require bureaucratic reforms back home in the United States as well as in the field. (See the Center’s June 2008 report “In Search of Sustainable Security” for details on these recommended reforms.)

In the interim, though, the Obama administration should not rely on unaccountable government contractors to fill the void. The lack of a broader coordinating strategy in the country within the international community for rebuilding Afghanistan also means that PRTs frequently operate independent of any single and coherent national reconstruction strategic. Because many coalition partners are unable or unwilling to provide more

U.S. soldiers and Afghan residents gather to take part in the opening of a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Lashkar Gah, Helmand province.

military forces, the United States should call on our allies—particularly these NATO countries—to provide additional capacity in critical areas such as development assistance and civilian mentoring teams.

While the majority of military reinforcements will be deployed to the conflict-ridden south and east, the United States and its coalition partners should disperse economic assets and development teams to more stable and cooperative parts of the country. Development assistance should be focused in permissive geographical locations, rather than where the insurgency is strongest—both to reward the allied population with improved economic conditions and to demonstrate to the adversarial population the tangible benefits of cooperating with U.S. and allied forces.⁴³

Provide security and resources for Afghanistan's presidential and parliamentary elections

The perceived legitimacy of the Afghan government among its people is critical to building a stable government that is capable of standing on its own. Ensuring that representative elections are conducted in as free, fair, and secure a manner as possible must be a top priority for U.S. and coalition policymakers in the coming months. To that end, the coalition must commit the resources necessary to carry out and monitor the August presidential elections.

The recent decision by Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission to postpone presidential elections until August 20—taken in light of security and weather concerns that could limit participation—offers security forces an opportunity to focus resources more directly on the election. NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has indicated that the alliance will send an additional 4,000 NATO troops for this purpose.⁴⁴

Yet this delay also opens up a potential constitutional crisis. President Karzai's term of office is set to expire May 21, and there is no clear guidance in the Afghan constitution for what will happen in the interim between the end of his term and elections. Intensive diplomatic efforts will be required to mediate some form of national consensus between the president and members of the opposition to resolve the issue prior to the end of Karzai's mandate.

Promote a diplomatic regional strategy

Afghanistan's history and geography make the success of a stable Afghan government a critical interest for the neighboring powers, all of which will suffer if the country deteriorates further into a fragmented vacuum. The United States and other members of the international community must work to engage these countries in a unified effort in Afghanistan if that country is to be stabilized. As Afghan expert Barnett Rubin and Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid note, "only a regional diplomatic initiative that creates a consensus to place

The Pakistan connection

Pakistan shares several interrelated challenges with Afghanistan, as well as possessing its own unique troubles. Addressing both must be a top priority for the Obama administration in conjunction with any efforts made toward improving the situation in Afghanistan. The Center for American Progress's November 2008 report "Partnership for Progress: Advancing a New Strategy for Prosperity and Stability in Pakistan and the Region" addresses the multiple policy dynamics of Pakistan in greater detail. Key recommendations from that report are, in brief:

- **Broaden and deepen the strategic relationship between the United States and Pakistan.** A fundamental strategic shift in U.S. policy on Pakistan should occur away from a narrow focus on military and intelligence cooperation. Pakistan's problems will not be solved by military means alone. Long-term stability in Pakistan depends not only on curtailing extremism and militancy in Pakistan, but on strengthening Pakistan's economy and democracy and on reducing tensions between Pakistan and its neighbors. U.S. military approaches must be integrated into a wider political strategy for the region. The U.S. government should engage with leaders of Pakistan's civilian institutions and civil society in addition to its military establishment. The Obama administration should embark on a strategic dialogue with Pakistan that sets common goals for the two countries, building on the major non-NATO ally status it has already achieved.
- **Implement policies that recognize the regional dimension of Pakistan's security challenge.** Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan are inextricably linked, and U.S. policy must be formulated accordingly. The situation in Afghanistan is directly affected by instability along Pakistan's western borders, and longstanding Pakistan-India tensions have affected the Pakistani military's strategic calculus in curtailing militancy within Pakistan. These regional challenges will require a fundamentally different U.S. approach that eliminates the bureaucratic separation in Washington between diplomacy, development, intelligence, and military activities in Islamabad, Kabul, and New Delhi.
- **Organize integrated international support to assist Pakistan.** A coordinated international effort should occur with major donors, countries, organizations, and the United States in an actively supportive role. The multiple policy challenges that Pakistan faces—security threats from militant groups, governance failures, and major economic difficulties—require a concerted and organized international supporting effort. Pakistanis' suspicions of the United States mean that multilateral approaches will work more effectively than bilateral ones.
- **Approach Pakistan's military establishment in ways that support good governance and economic development.** The United States should continue to strengthen relations with Pakistan's military and intelligence agencies, but do so in a way that does not undermine civilian control and political reform in Pakistan. The United States should support and interact with the Pakistani military establishment with policies that encourage Pakistani civilian oversight. This means engaging with its military as a component of the government as a whole rather than as an autonomous institution, allocating more funding through the government of Pakistan and not the Pakistani military, and meeting Pakistani military officials while keeping Pakistani civilian leadership informed or present.
- **Support democratic transition in Pakistan without picking favored candidates or political parties.** The United States should support broader political reform in Pakistan, along with economic development programs and efforts to enhance security. The 2008 parliamentary elections represented an opportunity for Pakistan to give voice to the Pakistani people in how their society is governed. Yet the return of electoral democracy adds a new element of uncertainty to the continuity of leadership in Pakistan. At times Pakistani leaders may voice opposition to American policies, but the United States should resist the urge to circumvent them now and in the future.



stabilizing Afghanistan ahead of other objectives could make a long-term international deployment [to secure Afghanistan and the region] possible.”⁴⁵

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has taken an important step in the right direction by arranging a regional conference to be chaired by the United Nations on March 31, 2009, at The Hague in Holland and inviting Iran as well as Pakistan, India, Russia, and China. The participation of Iran, which the Bush administration cut out of discussions after initial cooperation following the 2001 toppling of the Taliban, will be important for the success of such a conference.

Moreover, holding it in a NATO country that has contributed a significant number of troops and has taken the lead in one of the most dangerous areas of the country will help underscore the importance of the NATO contribution to the success of the mission.

Many of the countries neighboring Afghanistan view the U.S. presence there with suspicion, and have reacted with ambivalence to past calls for support. Russia has sought to reassert its primacy in the region by offering its territory for the transshipment only of non-military supplies while also reportedly pressing for the closing of a critical U.S. airbase in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. China has indicated an interest in developing Afghan natural resources such as copper, but also has used the platform of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—composed of China, Russia, and several Central Asian republics—to call for a U.S. military withdrawal from the region.⁴⁶

Working through international organizations to ameliorate these concerns while simultaneously affirming a commitment to the long-term success of a stable Afghan government should be a major diplomatic priority for Secretary Clinton, her special representative Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, and the entire Obama administration.

Most important, the U.S.-led mission in Afghanistan will not succeed if elements within the Pakistani government—including the powerful Inter Service Intelligence and the Army—do not recognize that their continued support of the Taliban and other extremist groups directly threatens the security of their own country. The cultivation of these groups as part of a strategy of “strategic depth” against Pakistan’s longstanding rival India now threatens Pakistan itself, as militant groups increasingly seek to carve out “mini-states” in the country and target institutions of the Pakistani state.

The United States must work with the Pakistani government and military to eliminate these safe havens for international terrorist organizations and regional insurgent groups, through a process of diplomatic engagement, increased security cooperation, and economic assistance (see box on page 23 for a summary of our recommendations for Pakistan). That country’s limited capacity for effective counterinsurgency operations and selective approach to combating militant groups makes their presence along the border with Afghanistan and within Pakistan a shared threat.

Senior officials such as President Asif Ali Zardari, Chief of Army Staff Ashfaq Kayani, and ISI chief Lieutenant General Ahmad Shuja Pasha have acknowledged the dangers posed to Pakistan directly by terrorism, and recent meetings between senior U.S., Pakistani, and Afghan leaders. This raises hopes that regular tripartite discussions may improve coordination and cooperation on this issue.

Maintain capability to conduct missile strikes in Pakistan's border regions absent Pakistani capability and will to do so itself

The United States should maintain the capability to conduct military strikes in Pakistan's unruly tribal areas until Pakistan shows the capability and will to assume the responsibility for the threats emanating from this region.

Ultimately, these military strikes are not a long-term solution to combatting militancy in Pakistan or Afghanistan. These strikes into Pakistani territory must be made with extreme caution and only in cases where intelligence officials have the highest confidence that such strikes will be able to eliminate high-level Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders whose removal would have the greatest effect on the rest of their networks.

Intermediate policy recommendations

No matter how many resources the United States and its allies commit to Afghanistan, the mission is bound to fail if the Afghan government does not become accountable, effective, and representative. In countering the insurgency in Afghanistan, strengthening the credibility and capacity of the Afghan government is the most critical intermediate goal because to completely defeat the insurgency, the population must see that it is in its best interest to support the central government. Support for the Afghan government will only occur if Kabul provides rule of law, public services, and security.

Improving the lives of the Afghan people by providing the rule of law and basic services will not be possible without a strong, accountable, and responsive government in Kabul. The long-term support of the United States and its international partners will be critical to building Afghan government capacity and effectiveness. This will require the implementation of a number of intermediate sustainable security efforts.

Make the Afghan government a true partner in the effort

The United States and its international partners must place the Afghan government at the center of the international community's efforts to stabilize and rebuild the country. More than 60 donor countries and hundreds of international humanitarian and development

The mission is bound to fail if the Afghan government does not become accountable, effective, and representative.

organizations channel billions of dollars to Afghanistan every year with little cooperation among one another and rarely through the Afghan government. While dealing directly with the Afghan people may bypass corrupt officials within the Afghan government, it also undermines the Afghan government's connection to its people.

The United States must make it a priority to channel its funds and those of its coalition partners and international donor organizations through the Afghan government and its trust funds. In doing so, the coalition must pressure the Afghan government to allocate more government resources to the regional and local level to support strengthened sub-national governance and give the government a stake in peoples' lives.

The United States learned the hard way in Pakistan that supporting a country's leaders rather than the people and institutions of a host country can lead to a lack of accountability and moral hazard, particularly when it comes to dispersing aid. The United States and its coalition partners must make it clear that they support the Afghan people rather than any one leader. In doing so, the United States should implement a "Biden Plan for Afghanistan," a development plan based on then-Senator Biden's model for development assistance to Pakistan proposed in 2007. The initiative would be based on:

- Engaging the Afghan people, not just their rulers. This will involve everything from improved public diplomacy and educational exchanges to local high-impact projects that actually change peoples' lives
- Raising the baseline U.S. commitment to Afghan reconstruction and economic development assistance to as much as \$5 billion annually, through increased USAID and State Department capacity, existing Afghan development trust funds, and budget support, while maintaining careful oversight standards
- Conditioning a supplemental \$1 billion of civilian aid to Afghanistan every year based on Afghan government performance

Strict oversight of these funds by the United States and its allies alongside strict accountability by the Afghan government is fundamental to improving the impact of this increased aid. Steps to ensure this happens will help tackle the related issue of Afghan government corruption.

[Address corruption at all levels of the Afghan government](#)

While increasing the amount of aid directed through the Afghan government, the United States and its coalition partners must assist in the development of a national anti-corruption strategy. An effective strategy will hold the Afghan government accountable to the principles of the U.N. Convention against Corruption, which Afghanistan ratified last year.

Meanwhile, the United States must pressure the president of Afghanistan to utilize the Afghanistan Advisory Board on Senior Appointments to remove the most corrupt leaders and select qualified, honest officials. Additionally, the United States should seek to strengthen the existing Afghan General Independent Administration for Anti-Corruption, the Afghan-established anticorruption agency founded in 2004, while establishing mechanisms for the public to file complaints against Afghan government officials at the local, regional, and state level.

Strengthen the rule of law

The absence of rule of law and lack of avenues for conflict resolution throughout most of the country is causing increasing numbers of ordinary Afghan citizens to seek justice through shadow government structures, particularly the Taliban. The United States must lead and support a judicial sector strategy for addressing these shortcomings. In doing so, the United States should recognize the power of informal Afghan systems—jirgas and shuras—to provide local knowledge and mediation while using formal government systems to record and enforce agreements.

Support the development of effective Afghan security forces

An Afghanistan that can provide internal and external security for its people will ultimately depend on the ability of U.S. and coalition forces to enable and empower our allies to fight. Indeed, as counterinsurgency expert John Nagl notes, “foreign forces cannot defeat an insurgency; the best they can hope for is to create the conditions that will enable local forces to win for them.”⁴⁷

Unfortunately, because of the policies of the past seven years, Afghanistan’s defense forces are currently woefully undermanned, untrained, and ill-equipped. The authorized strength of the Afghanistan National Army and the Afghanistan National Police is only 134,000 and 82,000, respectively, or less than one-third the size of the Iraqi Security Forces in a much larger country and after a much longer war. The United States and its international partners must accelerate and expand the training and equipping of these forces over the short and long-term.

- **Afghan National Army.** Despite many shortcomings, the Afghan National Army is improving in quality and steadily increasing in numbers. And, unlike the Iraqi Army, the ANA is not strained by sectarian loyalties. But the ANA is significantly undermanned. The United States and its coalition partners must ensure that the ANA reaches its authorized total strength of 134,000 as quickly as possible. Right now, the ANA is approximately 80,000 strong.⁴⁸



AP PHOTO/MUSADEQ SADEQ

Soldiers of the Afghan National Army stand during a graduation ceremony at a military training center in Kabul. The U.S. military has spent billions of dollars training and equipping the Afghan National Army.

The coalition and its Afghan partners also should consider augmenting the ANA in the intermediate term. Indications that the Obama administration plans to expand the ANA to 260,000 must be accompanied with a commensurate plan to pay for their training, equipment, and salaries over the long- term.⁴⁹ This accelerated growth also must be accompanied with strict quality and discipline oversight. In order to ensure a high level of readiness, the coalition must ensure that all ANA units are outfitted with the needed equipment to carry out peace and stability operations as well as high-end conventional missions.

- **Afghan National Police.** In contrast to the ANA, the Afghan National Police is at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive. In many parts of the country, the ANP show up to work for the sole purpose of collecting bribes. Intimidation of all kinds is on the rise against Afghan civilians. The size of the Afghan National Police together with the Ministry of Interior officials, counter-narcotics police, and border police—the nation's total police force—totals about 76,000, according to payroll records.⁵⁰ These numbers are likely further inflated by false payroll reports wherein corrupt police officials report “ghost policemen” and collect these salaries for themselves.⁵¹

Very little effort has been expended to train the police until recently. Consequently, ANP readiness at the end of 2008 was abysmal: Only 18 of the nearly 375 ANP units were rated “capable of operating independently,” while 317 units were rated “formed but not yet capable of conducting primary operational missions.” Critically, only 37 percent of trainer spots on Police Mentor Teams were filled (886 out of 2,375 required) as of November 2008.⁵²

Yet there have been recent encouraging signs. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, U.S. agencies and the Afghan government have achieved their goals of restructuring and reducing the top-heavy and oversized Ministry of Interior and Afghan National Police officer corps. The joint U.S.-Afghan Focused District Development program also shows signs of effectiveness in imparting professionalism and effective policing skills and reducing avenues for corruption. All of these efforts are intended to help ensure the ANP are directed by professional staff that can manage a national police force.⁵³

Still, there is much work to do. The United States and its coalition partners must fill the approximately 1,500 vacant Police Mentoring Team slots while ensuring that the ANP reaches its authorized end strength of 82,000 as quickly as possible. This large and rapid increase will require the U.S. State and Defense Departments to continue to screen the Ministry of Interior officer corps for professionalism and integrity. Expanding the ANP to an approximately 150,000-strong force—as proposed by the Obama administration⁵⁴—also will require increasing the number of Police Mentoring Teams above and beyond the 1,500-person gap.

The successful yet undermanned Focused District Development program should serve as a model for ANP expansion, and efforts to constrain corruption through electronic salary transfers and digital IDs for police recruits should be expanded and supported. Contributions from allies such as Japan, which recently pledged to fund ANP salaries for six months, will be necessary to sustain the expansion of Afghan policing capability.⁵⁵

Split the insurgency where possible through targeted negotiation

President Obama, the U.S. commander in the Middle East, General David Petraeus, and President Karzai all are open to the idea of some form of talks with members of the insurgency, including some who are only loosely affiliated with the Taliban and may be willing to cease hostilities. Late last year, for example, Petraeus noted that “If there are people who are willing to reconcile [with the Afghan government], then I think certainly that that would be a positive step in some of these areas that have actually been spiraling downward.”⁵⁶

Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, who recently returned from an extensive tour of Afghanistan and the region, estimates that the hard-core element of the Taliban in the country is about 5 percent, saying that others tend to be Afghans who joined the Taliban because of a feeling that they had been unfairly treated by the Afghan government, government corruption, or are simply young, unemployed men who get paid by the Taliban to take up guns.⁵⁷

Given that anti-coalition and anti-government forces in Afghanistan are currently winning, they have little incentive to negotiate. But if the rapid deployment of additional U.S.

and allied forces as outlined in our short-term recommendations results in a reversal of insurgent momentum, opportunities may emerge to divide components of the insurgency through selective reconciliation talks.

While the international community and Afghan government must remain open to talks, clear nonnegotiable baselines or red lines for those talks must be established. These include a respect for the Afghan constitution and government writ, a halt to armed conflict with the Afghan state and its international supporters, and the removal of international terrorist organizations from insurgent protection.

Resist the urge to create the “Sons of Afghanistan”

Given the large and decisive impact of the “Sons of Iraq” and other Sunni-dominated grassroots anti-Al Qaeda efforts on the security situation in Iraq, many analysts and policymakers have called on U.S. forces to create and support a similar movement in Afghanistan. Of the many false parallels to Iraq, the idea of creating and supporting large-scale Afghan tribal militias is perhaps the most dangerous.

The power and autonomy that anti-Soviet mujahadeen leaders and regional warlords amassed following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in the 1980s was perhaps the main factor in the Afghan population’s acceptance of the Taliban in the mid 1990s. Empowering new and unaccountable local commanders to operate outside the structure of the Afghan government risks a return to this phase of Afghanistan’s history and an exacerbation of its many delicate fault lines.

Curb the drug trade in Afghanistan and the region

A counternarcotics strategy in Afghanistan will not be effective unless it is pursued in conjunction with and as a part of an effective counterinsurgency strategy that seeks to expand and strengthen an effective local justice system and economic infrastructure that allows and encourages the development of alternative livelihoods for poor farmers at the bottom of the drug supply chain. Aerial spraying and selective eradication efforts on the ground only drive poor and indebted farmers into a further dependence on the insurgency and criminal drug networks.

A decision by NATO defense ministers late last year to shift counternarcotics efforts to the interdiction and prosecution of higher-end traffickers linked to the insurgency must be paired with a serious investment in programs designed to build alternatives to the opium trade, and the reform of government agencies responsible for these efforts. As these efforts proceed, the United States and its NATO allies should, in the short term, explore the possibility of purchasing the entire opium crop.

The estimated cost of purchasing the entire crop would be \$2 billion a year, less than the costs of one month's military operations. Purchasing the whole crop would take away the revenue stream from the Taliban and other drug traffickers without cutting off income for more than half of the Afghan economy.⁵⁸ Critically, too, more education and treatment efforts must also be undertaken in opiate-consumer countries to lessen the demand for poppy and to deprive criminal and insurgent groups of funding streams.

Long-term policy objectives

All of the intermediate sustainable security steps outlined above must continue and be supported with more funding and more civilian resources as U.S. military operations begin to take a back seat to these more fundamental nation-building exercises. Over 10 years, the objective must be to support an Afghanistan that is able to defend itself internally and externally, that can provide for the basic needs of its own people in order to allow for the eventual withdrawal of international combat troops.

In the region, too, these same sustainable security efforts must continue. Overcoming Afghanistan's long history as a regional power vacuum and source of destabilization and insecurity in Central Asia must be a top priority for the United States and its allies. But the United States will not be able to, nor should it attempt to, pursue these goals alone. Diplomatic engagement with all of the region's key powers, including Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and yes, even Iran, must be pursued by the new administration.

While South Asia does not possess the critical energy resources of the Middle East, leading many policymakers to gloss over its importance, Afghanistan and Pakistan's position as a nexus of regional instability for multiple, critical regional—and potentially world—powers requires a serious long-term effort toward a more sustainable security foundation.

Conclusion: Regaining the momentum

Currently, anti-coalition and anti-Afghan forces are seizing the initiative in Afghanistan. The deployment of 17,000 additional U.S. combat troops to Afghanistan in the coming months may be sufficient to stop the bleeding for a while, but it is surely not enough to turn the tide. While additional U.S. forces will be critical to reversing the immediate deteriorating security situation, there is not a purely military solution to the situation in Afghanistan.

The conclusion of President Obama's internal review before the upcoming NATO summit in Strasbourg, France, early next month offers the administration an opportunity to clearly articulate a new way forward and a chance to secure the support of the American people and its NATO allies. But the president must make it clear that there are no quick fixes to the problem and that it will require a sustained commitment of up to a decade to achieve our short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals and that all these goals must be achieved if we are to protect our vital national interests.

We believe the American people will understand the need for such a commitment, provided the president is capable of conveying this message convincingly and forcefully, and takes the steps needed to seriously implement a sustainable security strategy for Afghanistan and the region. After far too many years of neglect, there is little time to waste.

Endnotes

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