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## **U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan From 2001 to Today**

Haley Stauss

**T**he attacks of September 11, 2001 shocked the world and wounded the United States. In a state of uncertainty, the US rose up in defiance, issuing strong statements that served to rally patriotism, threatening anyone on the other side of a solid red line: “You are either with us or against us.” In an act of retribution, the U.S. quickly planned to attack the perpetrators, al Qaeda. They were an unknown group to the American public, a stateless group of nomads who lived in caves and traveled along goat paths. It was a new type of enemy that used airplanes as weapons; the fight against them would require a new type of warfare. President Bush called it the War on Terror and issued a warning to anyone who harbored terrorists. Of course, Afghanistan’s government, the Taliban, who were recognized as legitimate by only three other governments, refused to turn over their guests who had been based in the country since 1997. With emotions running high and a sense of urgency to respond, the United States made invasion plans.

The ultimate goal of engagement was broad: to end terrorism. Regarding Afghanistan, the U.S. wanted to be sure that the country would never be used to launch terrorist attacks against the U.S. or her allies. President Bush wanted to use Afghanistan as an example to send a message to other terrorist organizations that the U.S. would not end the war until “every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated” (James M. Lindsay, 2001). The strategy was incomplete however; without a determined, well defined and measurable goal, the world’s greatest military power engaged in a war that has lasted ten years against an elusive and amorphous enemy that has been all but defeated. This paper will discuss the changing U.S. policy towards Afghanistan as time progressed, beginning with President Bush’s initial authorization to engage and the development of democracy as a goal, and then proceeding on to President Obama’s new strategy and the terms of the troop drawdown. The policy is long and

complicated; this paper will offer insight into the comprehensive timeline and general trends, and will touch on one possible policy avenue based solely on the United States' recent history in the country.

#### OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

President Bush prepared for war. On September 18, 2001, he signed a law that authorized the use of force against America's attackers (Bruno, 2011). He looked to other countries for support, especially from within the region. Within a month, the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), a Special Operations Unit, had landed in Uzbekistan, bordering the north of Afghanistan (Stewart, 2003). From the onset, the immediate objective was to destroy al Qaeda and their networks of support, and the administration had "stated that it is not out to replace one regime with another" (Gossman, 2001). However, the U.S. Army Center of Military History claims that the Army Special Forces were to "change the government of Afghanistan so that the country was no longer a safe haven for terrorists," demonstrating the confusion that surrounded the invasion (Stewart, 2003). The plan to take the country was called Operation Enduring Freedom. The Special Forces aligned with a number of commanders from the Northern Alliance—the anti-Taliban government that had been run into a miniscule part of northeastern Afghanistan. The U.S. was aware of the inner-rivalry between the Afghan commanders, and divided the Special Forces teams amongst them evenly to avoid favoritism (Stewart, 2003). With global and internal support, the U.S. was ready to invade.

Operation Enduring Freedom was the first taste of combat for most American soldiers. It commenced on October 7, 2001 with a bombing campaign (Bruno, 2011). On October 19, 2001, conventional ground forces invaded to meet up with their Afghan allies (Stewart, 2003). The first military success was the fall of Mazar-e Sharif, in the north on November 10, 2001 (Stewart, 2003). The Special Forces team assigned to the local warlord, General Dostum, had divided into two along with the general's men (Stewart, 2003). They moved in towards Mazar-e Sharif from the north and south of the city, with overhead support, until the Taliban fled. Taliban strongholds around the country fell quickly and without much resistance. The Taliban retreated from the capital, Kabul on November 13, 2001, to Kandahar, where the group had originated from, and to the Tora Bora Mountains.

The military was prepared to deal with the imminent human rights issues that were to follow the battles. On November 20, 2001, Central Command (CENTCOM) gave authorization

to initiate humanitarian operations and to “create conditions for a peaceful, stable Afghanistan,” (Stewart, 2003) effectively expanding the objectives of the operation. This brought in more Army support forces, however many worked “from outside of Afghanistan since the Central Command was under pressure to limit the “footprint” of American troops on the ground” in an conscious effort to not occupy the country as the Soviets had (Stewart, 2003). Nonetheless, they used old Soviet bases and airstrips for their convenience. Understanding this mindset is important because it shows a dominant American presence in the country would subside, but also that attentiveness to Afghan sensitivities only stretched so far. A Combined Joint Civil Military Operations Task Force (CJCMOTF) coordinated relief organizations (Stewart, 2003). They airlifted food packets to refugee camps, and dropped leaflets that “informed the Afghan people about their forthcoming liberation, and warned them of the dangers of unexploded ordnance and mines”—a thoughtful gesture considering the high literacy rate in the country (Stewart, 2003). In any case, the humanitarian effort reveals caution and awareness in the military, even if just on a small scale.

The first major obstacle that the operation faced had to do with prisoners of war rather than in the battlefield. Towards the end of November, prisoners after a battle were taken to a prison in Mazar-e Sharif without being thoroughly searched for weapons and devices (Stewart, 2003). When U.S. intelligence officers began to interrogate them, “some 600 of the “detainees” disarmed the guards and took over the prison compound,” capturing two intelligence agents (Stewart, 2003). One was killed, and the first conventional forces, a small Quick Reaction Force of infantry, entered Afghanistan to help (Stewart, 2003). Later in December, 2001, a task force was assigned to interrogate prisoners again. Having learned from this first prison incident, they took caution. Prisoners with “valuable intelligence were evacuated” to Kandahar, before they were sent to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for further interrogation (Stewart, 2003). U.S. strategy for handling prisoners was developing, but did not take into consideration the future ramifications that it would have on public and global opinion of the U.S.

The Taliban and al Qaeda were not yet eliminated from the country, though. Kandahar was the last remaining major city under Taliban control. The U.S. allied with a pro-western, anti-Taliban Pashtun—a rarity—named Hamid Karzai to attack Kandahar. It fell on December 7, 2001 (Stewart, 2003). The Tora Bora Mountains also held an unknown number of al Qaeda operatives. A mostly Afghan force carried out the operation with help from Special Forces. With

the fall of these last two strongholds, Afghanistan was considered liberated (Stewart, 2003). The original goals of destroying the al Qaeda base and their network, and the early adopted one of overthrowing the government, had been achieved. The Northern Alliance now held Kabul, and warlords from before the Taliban era were restored to their mansions in their respective cities.

Intelligence was concerned with other pockets of enemy forces and a possibility of guerilla warfare popping up. One such enclave of al Qaeda forces was discovered in a valley near the Tora Bora Mountains, and Operation Anaconda was planned to destroy it. It was the first major battle of the entire war, and took place from March 2, 2002 to March 19, 2002 (Stewart, 2003). They planned to isolate the enemy and prevent escape by blocking the exits of the valley. With about 2,000 U.S. soldiers and 1,000 Afghans, the operation was unprepared for the enemy's strength and strategy, and took heavy losses (Bruno, 2011) (Stewart, 2003). Al Qaeda also faced losses, and in the end, the U.S. and allies were victorious. In "Operation Enduring Freedom, American military power delivered a fatal blow to the Taliban and their al Qaeda allies for a major victory in the war on terrorism" (Stewart, 2003). The escape of Osama bin Laden was the only, albeit major, failure of Afghanistan, but with the country classified as liberated, attention shifted away from the Taliban and al Qaeda and towards the new war plans for Iraq. Afghanistan's secondary position would remain throughout the duration of President Bush's administration.

#### AFGHANISTAN'S NEW GOVERNMENT AND SECURITY FORCE

In December of 2001, in Bonn, Germany, a conference was held by the United Nations that included all the major players interested in Afghanistan's future government. This included the United States, with the demand for a pro-Western democracy, Iran and Pakistan, each interested in a friendly neighbor, Russia, India, various European countries, and Afghan factions, which included the Northern Alliance and a group representing the king, ousted in the 1970's (Dobbins, 2009). They set up a process for writing a constitution and electing a government (World Factbook, 2011). The process took place over three stages. The first, the interim government, lasted for six months, and Hamid Karzai was appointed head. Then the Loya Jirga nominated a transitional government to take over for the next eighteen months. Finally, a second Loya Jirga ratified the constitution, and elections were held (Kumar, 2001). The long process was purposeful by the international actors because it would allow time for the chaos to calm so

that no person could claim an emergency reason to abandon the constitution or democracy (Kumar, 2001). Bringing democracy to Afghanistan was in its first stages.

The Bonn Agreement also included guidelines on the multinational troop force that was to help the government achieve security and stability called the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The Northern Alliance originally had no desire for troops to remain, and so the size and mandate were meant to be much smaller than had taken place in other crisis zones, like Bosnia and Kosovo (Kumar, 2001). Their goals were to “deliver aid, stabilize Kabul, and train an all-Afghan security force” (Kumar, 2001). It became clear that stability would not come quickly, and the force had managerial issues as the command rotated every six months. In the fall of 2003, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) took permanent leadership although it had always been under the command of a NATO member (ISAF, 2011). At the same time, the United Nations also expanded their mandate to all of Afghanistan, not just in and around Kabul.

#### THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY OF 2002: THE DEFENDER OF FREEDOM

In September, 2002, President Bush issued his first National Security Strategy, which explicates the reason the U.S. continued its operation in Afghanistan after their nominal goals had been reached. The preface addresses the superiority of democracy and the values of freedom, the latter of which are shared by all peoples of the world. It calls on “freedom-loving people across the globe” to protect “these values against their enemies,” and declares that the U.S. will defend, preserve, and extend the peace through “fighting terrorists and tyrants,” “building good relations among the great powers,” and “encouraging free and open societies on every continent” (Bush, 2002, 3). This responsibility given to humanity is an inevitable determinant of American action. It is narrative in style, in which the U.S. is the protagonist in a global, ongoing battle. It claims a bond with the great powers of the world based on their common interests, and promises to strengthen the “global trading community to build a world that trades in freedom” (Bush, 2002, 4-5). It incorporates the lesson learned from Afghanistan: that weak states pose a threat and should be strengthened. The document puts responsibility for the free world on American shoulders, and the paternalistic attitude mandates that the U.S. help the world’s misguided states find security, stability, and democracy.

The entire document reiterates these ideological sentiments, and uses Afghanistan to justify American action, past and future. By declaring that “Afghanistan has been liberated,” the situation is made into an example of success (Bush, 2002, 11). That the “coalition forces continue to hunt down the Taliban and al-Qaida” means that America will not relent—a warning to countries that support terrorism or are terrorists themselves (Bush, 2002, 11). Action is further justified when posed as a fight for survival; it says the war on terrorism is a defense of democratic values and the way of life (Bush, 2002, 13). It never explicitly calls for democratization of Middle Eastern countries, but one cannot be surprised at the democratization path the U.S. pursued after having read it. It does not outline the action strategy, assessable goals, or actual policies in Afghanistan.

#### U.S CIVIL ASSISTANCE POLICY

U.S. policy for eliminating terrorism from Afghanistan came in a variety of forms. The major, ongoing effort was in the form of civil assistance to help the country stabilize. The Afghan interim government only wanted help where needed, so the U.S. continued the policy of “minimal footprint” to avoid being mistaken as an occupier force, as the Soviets were, and kept the number of troops in the country as low as possible. In November of 2002, the U.S. military, the UN, and nongovernmental organizations created provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) to help the government in redevelopment (Bruno, 2011). They were joint civilian-military organizations that performed governmental duties in cities around the country. The U.S. was in control of a majority of the organizations while ISAF was in control of the rest (Perito, 2011). They were disorganized, though, and succeeded in little else than as security for aid organizations (Bruno, 2011). In 2003, Donald Rumsfeld declared an end to major combat and a shifting of focus to development. The U.S. had hoped the international community that did not send troops would support the development phase (Bruno, 2011). With NATO’s assumption of control over ISAF and the ensuing expansion, each NATO country was assigned specific PRTs. Unlike in Iraq, the U.S. preferred to work with the international community in Afghanistan. With so many different leaders though, the PRT program became more uncoordinated, and aid workers claimed that the indistinction between combatants and humanitarian workers put them at risk (Perito, 2011).

Despite the bad reviews, PRTs continued to grow in number. A USAID program called the Quick Impact Project (QIP) was initiated in 2003, and was meant to “carry out short-term

stabilization activities” by making it easier for USAID officers in the PRTs to implement small projects, like irrigation systems, schools or clinics (Liskey, 2010) (USAID 1. , 2011). The QIP program ended in 2007, having accomplished over 440 projects (USAID 1. , 2011).

The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) launched in December of 2002. It listed a priority in four goals: 1) “engage with public and private sector development”; 2) “partner with community leaders to close the freedom gap with projects to strengthen civil society, expand political participation, and lift the voices of women”; 3) “work with parents and educators to bridge the knowledge gap with better schools and more opportunities for higher education;” and 4) “create economic, political and educational systems where women enjoy full and equal opportunities” (Stewart D. J., 2005, 407). The administration advertised MEPI well in the United States, and less so in the Middle East. The program’s expenditures for Fiscal Years 2002-2005 totaled \$239 million—which is barely above what the U.S. spent on civil society programs when such a policy did not exist in the 1990’s in the region, and which reportedly had very little effect (Stewart D. J., 2005, 407). The American public had become familiarized with the concept of government change as a legitimate policy.

By 2004, democratic reform in the entire Middle East “had become a central policy focus” (Stewart D. J., 2005, 409). The Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) was a grand plan that the administration had built up to the public that would bring about governmental change to Arab countries. It was written without any input from leaders of Middle Eastern countries. The GMEI was leaked and prematurely published, and faced a lot of criticism (Stewart D. J., 2005, 410). All of the Middle Eastern leaders rejected the initiative, which forced major changes to the document (Stewart D. J., 2005, 410-411). The intention could not be undone though, and the goal of democracy in Afghanistan was only solidified. A joint declaration from President Bush and President Karzai on May 23, 2005, reinforced the relationship between the two and the U.S. commitment to “help ensure Afghanistan’s long-term security, democracy, and prosperity” (Karzai, 2005). It also allowed the U.S. military to use Afghan facilities, and announced that the U.S. would train and equip the Afghan military so that eventually they could provide security themselves.

A new USAID civil assistance program was initiated in 2006. Called the Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCD), it began to replace the Quick Impact Projects that were phased out a year later (Liskey, 2010). The goals were to assist the



Afghan government in unstable areas with “at-risk populations,” encourage local communities to participate in their own development, and address the underlying causes of instability and support for the insurgency” (USAID 2. , 2011). However, the LGCD Program and the PRT projects are not correlated with stability, have therefore not increased stability, and have not offered legitimacy to the Afghan government (Liskey, 2010). Only two studies were found to draw any positive correlation, which was ultimately undermined: “Germany’s overseas development assistance program agency BMZ found that development assistance improved attitudes among Afghans toward foreign forces and state legitimacy;” which was “quickly undone by increased perceptions of insecurity” (Liskey, 2010). Under pressure to demonstrate success, the U.S. insisted that the PRTs were in fact making progress and continued to support them, but with very limited resources.

#### THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY OF 2006: DEMOCRACY AND COALITIONS

President Bush’s second national security strategy was calmer and less powered by ideological language—but without losing its ideology. The very first paragraph of his preface letter clarifies that this strategy’s “most solemn obligation” is “to protect the security of the American people” (Bush, 2006, 2). He takes ownership of values rather than declaring them universal. He says freedom, democracy, and human dignity are integral to American history and “inspire nations throughout the world” (Bush, 2002, 2). He says that free nations are more peaceful, so it is a vested interest of the U.S. that other countries are free, which is an erroneous assumption considering that the United States is the longest existing democracy in the world and was engaged in two wars (Bush, 2002, 2). The document states that the United States will promote these values through ending tyranny, promoting effective democracies, and strengthening global free and fair trade (Bush, 2002, 6). Free governments “are accountable to their people, govern their territory effectively, and pursue economic and political policies that benefit their citizens,” all factors that are difficult to achieve in war-torn states, as exemplified in Afghanistan (Bush, 2002, 2). The determination to build democracies is impressive though. It makes the U.S. commitment to liberating the world one for generations to follow. It seems to have learned that democracy cannot be accomplished quickly in a country that has no experience with it—a dramatic change from the initial commentary at the onset of the war in Afghanistan. It

does, however, claim to have achieved democracy there, though it differentiates what an effective democracy is (Bush, 2002, 7-8).

The document also puts a greater emphasis on working with the international community. Because the major problems that the United States faces are also problems that other countries face, and are problems that cross international borders, the best solution will come when countries work together (Bush, 2002, 2). In Afghanistan, the U.S. has always preferred to work with other countries, and wanted NATO nations to play a major role. Similar to the 2002 national security strategy, it takes initial responsibility by the U.S. as the leader, but is far more open and ready to work with the international community, recognizing the impact of a newly globalized world. When NATO countries slacked on their commitments, which was a major problem, the U.S. was forced to step in and provide the assistance (Jones, 2008, 5). It also says that governmental change has to come from within the country needing the change, and that the U.S. will offer encouragement (Bush, 2002, 38). In Afghanistan, the encouragement is very involved. Overall, the document says little about Afghanistan, an interesting fact but reflective of the administrations preferred focus on the Iraq War.

#### THE DICHOTOMY ON THE GROUND: INSURGENTS AND HOPE ON THE RISE

Things were not as good in Afghanistan as the administration liked to think they were. By April, 2005, the number of casualties associated with Operation Enduring Freedom began to grow (O'Hanlon, 2011, 11). The insurgency was growing and becoming more violent (Rubin, 2006). A strategic plan called the Afghanistan Compact was issued in January of 2006, and assessed the situation as uncertain and called for strong U.S. support (Rubin, 2006). Challenges that the country faced included the growing insurgency, shelters in Pakistan, the corrupt and futile government, drug trafficking, and human development being bottom of the list. (Rubin, 2006) If Iraq had not diverted attention away from Afghanistan, the problems of Afghanistan would be more visible to the public and the administration would not have had to take more responsibility for the growing problems in the country. Managerial problems probably would have been assessed and reformed.

Other than these major issues, there were positive effects of U.S. foreign policy on the Afghan people. In 2008, a public opinion poll showed that Afghans were still optimistic about the future of their country, with 71 percent approving of the U.S. presence (Jones, 2008, 8). 76 percent thought the Taliban overthrow was “a good thing,” which had been up at 88 percent the

year before, but is still admirable (Jones, 2008, 8). The economy was growing at an average of 10 percent for the last three years, inflation averaged around 8.5 percent, and primary school enrollment went from 19 percent in 2001 to 87 percent in 2005 (Jones, 2008, 2). There was a lot to be fixed, but in 2008 it still seemed possible.

#### THE 2008 CAMPAIGN

President Obama called for a refocus to Afghanistan in his campaign in 2008. He recognized that the situation was deteriorating and said he would move troops from Iraq—a war he disapproved of—to Afghanistan (CFR.org, 2008). Critical of President Bush’s limiting policies in the country, Obama believed that sending troops would demonstrate to NATO that the U.S. was serious and would encourage them to send more, too (CFR.org, 2008). He also said he would loosen restrictions on NATO, so they could actually do the jobs they originally agreed to do (CFR.org, 2008). A proposal of \$1 billion allocated to non-military assistance and safeguarded against corruption and spent in rural areas would help stabilize the country (CFR.org, 2008). He also thought that the U.S. should promote democracy through leading by example, namely “banning torture, extraordinary rendition and by closing the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay;” hypocrisy feeds mistrust of American purposes and principles (CFR.org, 2008). He also planned to support nongovernmental organizations that provide civic assistance in authoritarian states, and proposed a “Rapid Response Fund” to “provide foreign aid, debt relief, technical assistance and investment packages that show the people of newly hopeful countries that democracy and peace deliver,” and promised support from the U.S. (CFR.org, 2008). Overall, President Obama did support democracy promotion as a role for U.S. foreign policy, but it was not central to his policy on the Middle East.

#### PRESIDENT OBAMA IN OFFICE: A NEW STRATEGY

Upon inauguration, President Obama followed through on his campaign promises. He sent 17,000 more troops to Afghanistan, which was counterbalanced by the combat troop drawdown in Iraq (Bruno, 2011). The reinforcements were requested by the generals months prior, and approved by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, whom the President had brought into his administration from the prior. The troops were to focus on countering the resurgent Taliban and securing the border with Pakistan, and the overall strategy goals were narrowed to aims “such as preventing and limiting terrorist safe havens (Bruno, 2011). In March, an interagency plan linked Afghanistan and Pakistan because of al Qaeda’s bases there, and increased aid to

Pakistan to dismantle them (Bruno, 2011). It also called for 4,000 more troops to train Afghan security forces, which Karzai supported (Bruno, 2011). The following month, the U.S. had secured promises of an additional 5,000 NATO troops to help in the training, and foreign security forces for the presidential election in November, which elected Karzai to another term in a disputed outcome (Bruno, 2011). In December, another 30,000 American troops were promised, bringing the total to 98,000 (Bruno, 2011). The promise to refocus on Afghanistan was fulfilled.

#### COUNTER INSURGENCY OPERATIONS (COIN): LESSONS FROM IRAQ

A new military strategy coincided with the replacement of generals. U.S. commander General David D. McKiernan was replaced with the “fresh thinking” and “fresh eyes” of General Stanley A. McChrystal, an expert in counterinsurgency and Special Forces operations (Bruno, 2011). One of General McChrystal’s first steps was to set up a Pakistan Afghanistan Coordination Cell of 400 officers who would be focused on Afghanistan only for the next several years (Boot, 2009). The traditional pattern was for troops to serve six to twelve months in a war zone before they are relocated, with the result that the territory is unfamiliar to each new group of soldiers and there is “a disproportionate share of casualties when they first arrive” (Boot, 2009). Culturally in tribal Afghanistan, personal relationships between military leaders and tribal leaders are incredibly important, and the roles are often intertwined. By bringing the same group of troops to the same location time and again after their breaks at home allowed for a similar type of relationship to develop with the tribal leaders in a region—an incredibly important change for the strategy (Boot, 2009). This plan also allows the soldiers to become experts in their deployments, and promises much greater success overall.

A Tactical Directive issued by McChrystal as the commander of ISAF was released on July 6, 2009. Some of the document has been classified, but the released portions offer the public a better concept of the change in the strategy towards Afghanistan. In it, the goal is to “defeat the insurgency threatening the stability of Afghanistan” by gaining support of the population (McChrystal, 2009, 1). He goes on, “we will not win based on the number of Taliban we kill, but instead on our ability to separate insurgents from the center of gravity—the people,” and he demands respect and protection for the Afghan population. “This is different from conventional combat... We must avoid the trap of winning tactical victories—but suffering strategic defeats—by causing civilian casualties” (McChrystal, 2009, 1). This new form of fighting,

Counterinsurgency Operations, was tried and proved successful in Iraq. Though his tactics were good and efforts to turn the situation in Afghanistan were real, General McChrystal resigned after a Rolling Stones article published his relentless, crude comments about his boss, the commander-in-chief Obama.

President Obama was careful to clarify that the resignation of General McChrystal did not mean a change in policy; it was just a change in personnel. General David Petraeus had commanded all forces in Iraq and the counterinsurgency strategy there before moving to commander of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), and then being appointed the replacement of General McChrystal in Afghanistan (Lee, 2010). General Petraeus is a major proponent of COIN, and under his command, the strategy took root in Afghanistan (Lee, 2010).

Counterinsurgency operation is focused on winning the hearts and minds of the target population. It stresses multiple factors that the military needs to consider to succeed. It stresses the importance of human rights, because the security and well being of the population are necessary in order to gain legitimacy in their eyes (Sepp, 2005, 9). Law enforcement will discover and arrest insurgents, and a well trained, honest force is more capable of collecting intelligence; a ratio of twenty police to each 1,000 civilians is the general ratio required (Sepp, 2005, 9). Engaging in population control entails keeping tabs on the population through check points or ID checks in order to know who is where, and to prevent the movement of insurgents (Sepp, 2005, 10). Encouragement for the political process is central to the COIN strategy—civilians should engage in it by voting and demonstrating that insurgents would be better represented through a legitimate process (Sepp, 2005, 10). Counterinsurgent warfare involves allied foreign militaries to provide security and training until the indigenous forces are capable (Sepp, 2005, 10). Secure borders are necessary in order to prevent terrorists from crossing borders and infiltration (Sepp, 2005, 11). Finally, in order to quickly respond to emergencies in an organized manner, a strong executive authority needs to be in charge of the entire operation (Sepp, 2005, 11).

General Petraeus took the doctrine very seriously and applied it to all aspects of Afghanistan. New contracting guidelines were issued because contract spending and who benefits are integral to Afghanistan's economy (Petraeus, 2010). It stipulates that purchases for construction, goods, and services should be made from Afghan firms to "bolster economic growth, stability, and Afghan goodwill toward their government and ISAF," and that contracts

should hire Afghans first, and sub-contract with trustworthy Afghan companies whenever possible (Petraeus, 2010). Commanders should be well aware of those that they make contracts with, to ensure that money supports those who build “relationships with local businesses and community leaders,” and is not funneled into insurgent hands (Petraeus, 2010). He basically forewarns that contracting needs to be done responsibly.

ISAF also posts a list of behavioral guidelines for soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and civilians that Petraeus wrote and updated with feedback. They include points about earning trust and confidence from the Afghan people, living among them and consulting local citizens in location of joint bases and combat outposts (Petraeus, 2010). Another is fight hard and fight with discipline: “Hunt the enemy aggressively, but use only the firepower needed to win a fight” in order to avoid killing civilians (Petraeus, 2010). Other points are identify corrupt officials, hold what we secure, be a good guest, and walk—stop by don’t drive by. These guidelines change the way war is fought and bring the military to the civilian population. They infiltrate every aspect of Afghan life, and Petraeus is a known detail-oriented commander who could handle it.

#### NATIONAL SECURITY OF 2010: AMERICA AS THE CAPACITY BUILDER

President Obama’s National Security Strategy is a very comprehensive, well thought out plan. In the preface, he calls to increase American strength, security and ability, adding that America should “appeal to the aspirations of peoples around the world” (Obama, 2010, i). He plans for several approaches to reach this aim. President Obama calls upon traditionally domestic issues, economy, education, innovation, and energy, as a major feature of the strategy. He plans to strengthen America’s diplomatic capability to “compliment” the military (Obama, 2010, i). Like President Bush, President Obama calls for better integration and cooperation with the international community. He reiterates that it is a national security interest to strengthen and modernize allies to take care of themselves, adding a humanitarian element to President Bush’s call for free governments (Obama, 2010, ii). Also like the 2006 strategy, this one believes in the universality of American values, and the justice and exportation of democracy.

The report clearly discusses Afghanistan. Declaring the war there as “only one element of our strategic environment,” it stresses that defeat of al Qaeda is the main end point. It connects Pakistan to this battle, as these countries are the “frontline,” shifting focus away from Iraq (Obama, 2010, 4). The strategy also outlines exactly what the different sectors involved with Afghanistan are meant to do in order to accomplish an Afghanistan that cannot be used as a safe

haven for terrorists, and one strong enough to resist overthrow by the Taliban (Obama, 2010, 20). The military, working with ISAF, will target the insurgency, secure population centers, and increase efforts to train Afghan security forces (Obama, 2010, 21). The U.S. government will work with the UN and the Afghan government “to improve accountable and effective governance,” and combat corruption (Obama, 2010, 21). The U.S. will also “foster a relationship with Pakistan” so that together they can beat al Qaeda. On building stabilization in post-conflict zones, the strategy explains that those governments and the “political will of their leaders” sincerely affect US efforts, a restraint around which the U.S. will try to design policy (Obama, 2010, 26-27). Notably, it does not list building an Afghan state as a key security aim. The document reserves the right to use force, but stresses that force will be a last resort—a comment that describes the president's character rather than U.S. action, considering involvement in two wars.

#### AS THE WAR WAS FOUGHT

In 2009, President Obama had announced the plan for troop withdrawal along with the massive surge. He was determined to defeat al Qaeda and hand the reins over to the Afghan government. The withdrawal plans called for security operations to begin being handed over to Afghan security in the summer of 2011, conditions permitting. A report one year later would announce how conditions had changed. The White House review was released on December 16, 2010, intimated progress “in clearing the Taliban from Kandahar and Helmand provinces” where they had been very strongly based (Masters, 2010). Positive responses testified that the surge had only been completed in the fall and was “already having a considerable impact,” and public opinion was slow to realize it (Masters, 2010). Afghans themselves were slow to recognize it, and public support for the insurgency waned with the arrival of 30,000 extra troops (Bajoria I., 2010). Though there were other challenges and progress was unstable, the report announced that the July drawdown was on track, clearly restating as long as conditions permitted.

The effort to prepare the Afghan government and to win hearts and minds was in process. A document called the Afghanistan National Development Strategy: Prioritization and Implementation Plan, 2010-2013, was published on July 20, 2010. It stated that in collaboration with the government of Afghanistan and the international community, an “action plan for improved governance, economic and social development, and security” was agreed upon for the Afghan government to follow (Ministry of Finance, 2010-2010, 12). It laid out the country's

aspiration to be a strong, independent Islamic constitutional democracy by 2020, which has a robust capitalistic economy with respect for human rights and justice (Ministry of Finance, 2010-2010, 12). It addressed each issue the country faced, from good governance, accelerating agriculture and rural development, to the transition to an Afghan-led security force and problems of narcotics. The plan outlined policy steps that would guide the government's actions.

Richard Holbrooke, President Obama's special representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan from 2009 until his death in December, 2010, had been instrumental in pushing for more civilian related issues (Masters, 2010). Holbrooke's accomplishments included tripling the number of U.S. civilian personnel to more than 1,000 people, ending the focus on poppy eradication as it was detrimental to Afghan farmers and therefore counterproductive, putting effort on President Karzai to improve the corruption issue, and voicing the need to negotiate with the Taliban (Bajoria I., 2010). In 2010, President Obama still would not speak with these opponents, even though nearly fifty US, Pakistani, and Afghani regional experts sent a letter explaining the importance of a settlement (Bajoria I., 2010).

A battle about the war was waging in the U.S. as well. Republicans and Democrats made very vocal arguments in favor and against the war, respectively, adding another element to the decisions that had to be made. Republicans are adamantly against a deadline for the troop drawdown (Bajoria II., 2010). President Obama announced it to please his Democratic base, who are adamantly against continuation of the war (Bajoria II., 2010). He has had to walk a fine line between convincing the Taliban and insurgents that the U.S. is serious about the war, and fulfilling his promise to the American public (Masters, 2010). Disagreement on an action plan in the White House was immense, as well (Masters, 2010). Further, the economic and debt crises were well underway, and Americans were concerned with the billions of dollars being spent on the war (Bajoria II., 2010). And finally, critics of counterinsurgency operations vocalized their unease with the conditionality component to COIN (Gentile, 2010). They claim that it takes control out of your hands when all you do is sit back and wait for the population's heart to prefer yours over the insurgents. They insist that a time table for troop drawdown means nothing when conditions are attached to it—another argument that the public has not picked up on. A leader is certainly needed to make decisions in with all this disagreement.

Improvement in the country continued into 2011. General David Petraeus reported to Congress in March, 2011 on the conditions in Afghanistan, which follow. Progress had been



achieved, and the “security bubble” around Kabul had expanded (O'Hanlon S. B., 2011). Afghan security forces were improving so much that ISAF thought that only 30 percent of population center provinces were secure in 2010, and 50 percent were secure by the time of the report (O'Hanlon S. B., 2011). Further, 45 percent of Afghans feel safe moving about, which is an improvement of 12 percent from the prior year (O'Hanlon S. B., 2011). However, gains are fragile and the amount of violence had gone up from the prior year.

On May 1, 2011, President Obama authorized a Special Operations Unit to go into Pakistan and kill Osama bin Laden. This success was praised the world over. With the leader of al Qaeda killed, the U.S. followed through on its first withdrawal of 30,000 troops in July, bringing the remainder to 70,000 (Hass, 2011). The decision brought much concern and relief. Those opposed to the drawdown think that security is on the horizon and has yet to be accomplished (Hass, 2011). They point to the incredible security gains in the last year, and say those gains need to be consolidated and expanded; “Regional Command East—the vast, mountainous region between Kabul and Pakistan where the Haqqani Network, the Taliban, the Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin, and al-Qaeda have their strongholds” has yet to be secured (Hass, 2011). Those in favor to the drawdown claim that the number of troops needed in Afghanistan are much lower—25,000 to do counterterrorist operations and continue training Afghan security would be enough (Hass, 2011). They continue, more troops will not be able to solve the problem of the Taliban strongholds in Pakistan or the internal Afghan divides that perpetuate problems, and with strong diplomacy with the Taliban, U.S. presence is no longer needed (Hass, 2011). The drawdown went on, however, and time will tell.

Just today, December 5, 2011, world leaders convened in Bonn, Germany to discuss the exit strategy for all foreign troops—exactly ten years after a meeting in the same place to plan Afghanistan’s future. The results are not out yet, but they discussed ideas about making Afghanistan an economic trading hub, and tapping into their vast mineral sources to help the country sustain itself. Afghanistan truly seems to be on its path to liberation of foreigners. At least the U.S. is making it seem that way.

#### CONCLUSION

President Bush’s strategy in Afghanistan developed quickly in the beginning, and became static early on. The initial success of Operation Enduring Freedom in overthrowing the Taliban in three months and instituting a process for establishing democracy is an incredible

accomplishment and testimony to a new age of warfare. When the question of what to do next arose, it followed that stability became a priority, and therefore democracy. Success at Bonn and the speed with which such a complicated matter was dealt with should have been a warning though, necessitating caution. Instead, the administration called Afghanistan liberated, and the first two goals of destroying al Qaeda bases in the country and overthrowing the Taliban government were accomplished. Two elections held prompted the government to classify Afghanistan as a democracy in the National Security Strategy of 2006, and the third goal was accomplished. Yet Afghanistan was not stable, and so the U.S. government continued its unfocused work there, all the while the insurgency grew.

President Obama's strategy was clearly much more focused on Afghanistan. President Obama ensured that he followed through with his campaign promises to the American public, but also tried to listen to the concerns of the commanders. Applying the lessons learned from Iraq, the counterinsurgency operations model was implemented in Afghanistan. Finding a man that he could trust and work with in General Petraeus, President Obama moved forward with the effort to win the hearts and minds of Afghans. Security was slowly and fragily growing in the country, but the decisive victory in the killing of bin Laden changed the tide for good. On November 30, 2011, a total of 1,841 Americans and 969 foreigners had died in the war (O'Hanlon I. S., 2011). The President finalized the decision to bring the first round of troops home, and to have the rest home by 2014.

The strategy in Afghanistan has been dramatically changed. Going from a terribly run war with high public approval ratings in both Afghanistan and the U.S., the change in policy coincided with both a much better run war, well defined strategy, and a decrease in public support in both countries. It is known that counterinsurgency operations are painful in the beginning, resulting in higher numbers of casualties, but their success in the long term outweighs the initial problems.

Arguments in favor and against staying in the war are persuasive; however, pulling the troops out is the correct decision. This policy weans Afghanistan off dependence on foreign troops at an early stage, and forces them to fend for themselves. The chances that U.S. troops could affect the rugged mountainous region in the east, or secure the border well enough to seal the Pashtuns into Pakistan are minimal. If a civil war erupts, as so many are predicting, then those soldiers who are trained and equipped by foreign soldiers will come out on top. They are

the ones working for the government. They are largely of the same ethnicity—Tajik—and might not break off into their tribes. And the U.S. will keep an eye on the country. A civil war will probably not prompt American action after 2012, but a genocide would. Afghanistan is better off in Afghan hands. The United States will accomplish what it can by 2012, conditions permitting.

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