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# COIN in Afghanistan - Winning the Battles, Losing the War?

*“If you don't know where you're going. Any road will take you there”*

(From a song by George Harrison)

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Recent US initiatives to increase troop numbers in Afghanistan, the surge, coupled to changes in the stabilization and development approaches have lead to a discussion on the role of counter insurgency, COIN, in Afghanistan. In this report Magnus Norell describes and discusses the current international Afghanistan policy and the COIN debate. Since the policy of the Obama administration is central to this debate the U.S. policy features prominently in the report.

Several researchers at FOI have commented on this report. I would especially like to thank Kristina Zetterlund who did a marvellous job at editing the final draft.

John Rydqvist

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## **Sammanfattning**

Kriget i Afghanistan är inne i ett avgörande skede. Efter valet i augusti 2009 (som enligt många och samstämmiga källor var allt annat än fullt demokratiskt) och den amerikanska regeringens beslut att skicka mer trupp, måste det internationella samfundet besluta sig för en långsiktig strategi som kan lösa problemen i Afghanistan.

I hög utsträckning står det internationella samfundet inför samma frågor man stod inför på senhösten/vintern 2001 då Talibanregimen störtades: vad vill man med Afghanistan? Vilka är de långsiktiga målen? Och hur ska man nå dit?

Med en korrumpierad regim i Kabul, en fiende (i form av Talibaner på båda sidor av den Pakistansk-Afghanska gränsen och internationella jihadister) som blivit allt starkare och ett allt svagare Pakistan, är utsikterna för en fredlig och stabil utveckling i Afghanistan sämre än på länge.

Nyckelord: Krig, uppror, Allierade, FN, Våld, terrorism, Pashtun, FATA.

## Summary

A central tenet in any COIN-operation is to win the hearts and minds of the civilian population, often caught in the middle of the fighting. In Afghanistan, this central tenet has been constantly tested when an increasingly pressured international but US-led force is trying to beat back, or at least hold the line, against a well-armed, well-trained and motivated Taliban-led insurgency.

In Afghanistan, the way the war has been going for the past few years, it is no overstatement to say that the western forces has not been able to square the circle of fighting the insurgency and winning the civilian population to their side. Instead, an increasingly alienated Afghan population have had to endure a rising number of dead and wounded through allied air strikes, used when 'boots on the ground' have not been sufficient. This has now reached the stage when the US and NATO commander in Afghanistan, General McChrystal, has ordered that air strikes should only be used as a last resort. But the debate goes on (and new incidents keep happening despite the new orders) and it is clear that without altering the present picture and reality of Afghans dying at the hands of those ostensibly there to help, the war will not be won, however that is computed.

In addition, there is a rising popular disappointment and discontent with the Afghan government. Wide-spread corruption, lingering internal violence tied to the illegal drug-trade, an insurgency being more assertive than ever and a distinct lack of re-construction in many parts of the country, adds to the wide gap between the Afghan populace and the Afghan government. A gap made wider after an election filled with allegations of fraud.

In the winter of 2009, with the troop-surge in Afghanistan in full swing, it is clear that that particular strategy devised by President Obama and his new security team is coming under increasing criticism, including from his own democratic constituency. So much so, that the administration is becoming more and more dependent on republicans to support the troop-surge, even if criticism with the way the administration is conducting the war is gaining momentum even there. The old and simple political narrative of the war in Afghanistan – that this was the 'good' war going after the instigators and perpetrators of the 9/11-attacks

– has more or less fallen by the wayside. As popular support for this ‘good’ war is falling, American casualties are rising and confidence in the Afghan government is declining.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Pakistan, war, insurgency, Taliban, Allies, UN, Violence. Terrorism, Pashtun, FATA.

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# 1 Introduction – a history of violence

*“Long Live The Taliban!”*

(Writing on the wall of a local mosque in the Kharotabad section of Quetta.<sup>1</sup>)

A central tenet in any counterinsurgency (COIN) operation is to win the hearts and minds of the civilian population, who are often caught in the middle of the fighting. In Afghanistan, this central tenet has been constantly tested when an increasingly pressured international but US-led force has been trying to beat back, or at least hold the line, against a well-armed, well-trained and motivated Taliban-led insurgency.

In Afghanistan, the way the war has been going for the past few years; it is no overstatement to say that the Western forces have not been able to square the circle of fighting the insurgency and winning the civilian population to their side.<sup>2</sup> Instead, an increasingly alienated Afghan population have had to endure a rising number of dead and wounded through allied air strikes, used when ‘boots on the ground’ have not been sufficient. This has now reached a stage where the US and NATO Commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley Chrystal, has ordered that air strikes should only be used as a last resort. But the debate goes on (and new incidents keep happening despite these new orders) and it is clear that without altering the present reality of Afghans dying at the hands of those ostensibly there to help, the war will not be won.

In addition, there is a rising popular disappointment and discontent with the Afghan government. Wide-spread corruption, lingering internal violence tied to the illegal drug-trade, an insurgency more assertive than ever and a distinct lack of re-construction in many parts of the country, add to the wide gap between the Afghan populace and the Afghan government.<sup>3</sup> This gap was made wider after the 2009 election and it’s alleged and, more importantly, proven cases of fraud.<sup>4</sup> As many as 1.5 million votes were assessed to be faulty or fraudulent according to EU election monitors.<sup>5</sup>

In the autumn and early winter of 2009, with the troop-surge in Afghanistan in full swing, it is clear that that particular strategy devised by US President Barack Obama and his new security team is coming under increasing criticism.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> *Vanity Fair*, July 2008, p. 60

<sup>2</sup> See also: Olsson, Stefan, *Kampen om “hearts and minds” i Afghanistan*, FOI user report, FOI-R--2803--SE, Stockholm, September 2009.

<sup>3</sup> *International Herald Tribune* (henceforth *IHT*), web-edition, October 14, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> *Time*, October 19, 2009, p. 26-29.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> In mid-September, there were 21,000 additional US soldiers in Afghanistan, putting the total at 68,000 US troops.

critique is not just heard from political opponents but also include voices from within his own Democratic constituency. The administration is becoming more and more dependent on Republican support for the troop-surge, even though criticism with the way the administration is conducting the war is gaining momentum also within the Republican Party (see discussion below). The old and simple political narrative of the war in Afghanistan – that this was the ‘good’ war going after the instigators and perpetrators of the 9/11-attacks – has more or less fallen by the wayside. As popular support for this ‘good’ war is falling, American casualties are rising and confidence in the Afghan government is declining.

Finally, on December 1 2009, President Obama delivered his long anticipated speech outlining the Afghan strategy (fittingly enough the speech was delivered at West Point), a strategy intended to ‘*bring this war to a successful conclusion*’.<sup>7</sup> However, the strategy outlined in Obama’s speech was not new, as much as it was the logical ‘summing-up’ of a process that had been on-going since early spring that same year. The strategy was an attempt to combine the contradictory goals of, on the one hand, meeting domestic criticism demanding a troop withdrawal (or at least a time-table for a withdrawal), and, on the other, providing the necessary military tools to enable General McChrystal to successfully bring the war to a closure.

In the days following Obama’s speech at West Point, the new Afghan strategy took some heavy pounding. It was pointed out, for example, that by stating clearly that the US plans to withdraw in 2011, the Taliban, whose planning horizon stretches over years and decades rather than weeks and months, can just hunker down and tough it out, waiting for the US (and her allies) to leave.<sup>8</sup> The reasons for stating a more specific time-table not only includes appeasing domestic critics (as the cynics like to state), but is apparently also the result of a careful appraisal of what is achievable. The signal to the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan alike, which time is running out for them to demonstrate real commitment to political and military reform and progress, is not lost. Without the heavy influx of foreign aid (civil and military) these both governments would be in a much worse situation.

The obvious omission of Pakistan in the speech also came in for criticism since it is clear that to ‘win’ in Afghanistan, something has to be done about the rising threat of the Pakistani Taliban (see below). But the US can only do so much in pressuring Islamabad to deal with their own Pashtu-centred Taliban and their aid to the insurgency in neighbouring Afghanistan. The Pakistani offensive in South

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<sup>7</sup> “Allies hang back on adding troops”, *IHT*, December 3, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> In Afghanistan this different time-line between the West and the Taliban is sometime summed up in the phrase (heard on several occasions by the author): *You have the watches, but we have the time.*

Waziristan, initiated in the latter half of 2009, will not in any significant way hinder continued cross-border cooperation between the Pashtu tribes on both sides of the Durand Line. This is a key point, since as long as the Pakistani army does not launch a more comprehensive and significant campaign against the Taliban, they will not contribute in any profound way to America's or NATO's agenda in Afghanistan. The old 'truth' in Pakistan that only Pashtuns can govern in Afghanistan and that helping the Islamists there to power will work as a powerful obstacle to peace in the area. To change that Pakistani notion, is and will continue to be difficult for the Western allies to do.

What several critics also have focused on is the idea that the new strategy is really about finding a way to create the minimal conditions that would make an American withdrawal acceptable.<sup>9</sup> That does not hinge so much on what can be achieved on the battlefield as on what kind of political strategy can be designed to get the Afghan house in order before it is too late. With the war increasingly unpopular in the West (something also the Taliban can see when watching CNN or Al Jazeera), this last point is crucial.

All these critical factors, raised in the immediate aftermath of President Obama's speech, will be of importance in the coming years as the US and her allies try to meet the goals of winning militarily against the insurgency, building a viable Afghan state structure, speeding up reconstruction and development as well as empowering an Afghan government that is deeply mistrusted by its own people. At the time of writing (December 2009) the stakes are high and the prospects of bringing all these goals to a successful end, rather bleak. The war – going from bad to worse

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<sup>9</sup> See for example *IHT*, December 4, p. 8 & 5/6, p. 6.

## 2 The war – going from bad to worse

*“It is serious and it is deteriorating....The Taliban insurgency has gotten better, more sophisticated”*

(Admiral Mike Mullen, US chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CNN, August 23, 2009)

The Obama administration is currently caught in the confluence of the trends outlined above – rising casualties and declining confidence in the Afghan government. Added to this is the confusion of what exactly it is the US and her allies are supposed to do in Afghanistan, how long it is going to take and how well the new strategy will work.

Several factors lie at the heart of this conundrum;

### 2.1 An un-winnable war?

*“When I look at history, I know I will win”*

(Un-named Taliban fighter in Quetta, talking to Journalist Janine Di Giovanni.)<sup>10</sup>

The first issue to consider is that the overall view, held by the military and American public alike, that the war in Afghanistan was ‘the good war’ has been shattered. Recent polls in the US suggest that the war is viewed as neither ‘winnable’ nor particularly ‘good’.<sup>11,12</sup> On the domestic front, the Obama administration already ran into difficulties defending the ‘surge’ in troop levels announced in the first half of 2009 to deploy more than 20,000 additional US soldiers to Afghanistan. Critique came from groups that had hitherto defended the Afghan policy, including various Democrats in Congress.<sup>13</sup> Their main criticism was that the policy was not efficient enough. Critics have also started to speak up on the Republican side of the aisle in both the Senate and the House. In the long run, this mounting critique could be a major political headache for the Obama administration.

Obama still has support from enough people in both parties and it is not certain that the slowly growing opposition on the Hill will force Obama to switch course. However, in tandem with rising casualties (2009 was the deadliest year since the war began); the administration faces a potentially difficult challenge in

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<sup>10</sup> *Vanity Fair*, July 2008, p. 62

<sup>11</sup> “Obama’s Afghan policy run into political reality”, *IHT*, September 3, 2009, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Good’ and ‘just’ in comparison to the war in Iraq that is. A war seen as necessary (it was there that the 9/11-plot was hatched) in contrast to the chosen war in Iraq.

<sup>13</sup> Op. cit. *IHT*, September 3, 2009.

molding the new strategy so that it is efficient but also reinvigorates the belief in a successful outcome of the war.

At the heart of the political debate in Washington as well as in other allied capitals lies the question of what kind of end result is sought and how to achieve it. What from the start was termed and viewed as a counter-terrorism operation (eliminating the people behind the 9/11-attacks) soon enough developed into something much bigger. During the first months of occupation, the original American aim of limiting Operation Enduring Freedom to crushing Al Qaeda and its allies the Taliban regime was clear. Any state-building was left to the UN and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).<sup>14,15</sup> Over the years, however, with the Taliban bouncing back, disenchantment with the Afghan government rising, and the prospect of a long, escalating and drawn-out war growing, US objectives came to resemble a long-term nation-building process.

With this came the need to change strategy and adapt to the new realities and goals. The Obama administration inherited the war from Bush-II but soon realized that a new approach was necessary. This change came gradually (the debate started during the last phase of the Bush administration) and by the time a new strategy had been devised, it was clear that this was not going to be the short, swift counter-terrorism operation.

To be fair, there was from the start an element of nation-building in the way the Western powers approached the war in Afghanistan. The then British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, said for example that *'we will not turn our backs on the people of Afghanistan again'*.<sup>16</sup> Five years later, British Defence Secretary John Reid claimed reconstruction was part of the reason behind the Western intervention, saying: *'We would be perfectly happy to leave in three years and without firing a shot because our job is to protect reconstruction'*.<sup>17</sup>

There have been a lot of shots fired since then and reconstruction is sorely lacking in many parts of Afghanistan, adding to the rising resentment against the Western powers and their military presence.

The shift in thinking to nation-building from the earlier focus on merely counter-terrorism has more or less been completed. But the discussion of how that policy shift should be carried out, and if it is even what the US really should be doing, has gained momentum. The President still has enough bipartisan support to carry

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<sup>14</sup> For more on state-building and nation-building in general, see: Talention, Andrea Kathryn, "Nation Building or Nation Splitting? Political Transition and the Dangers of Violence". In *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 21, Number 3, 2009. Goetze, Catherine and Guzina, Dejan, Special Issue on Statebuilding, *Civil War*, Vol. 10, December 2008, No. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Norell, Magnus, *The Taliban and the MMA*, p.61-82, in: The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, August, 2007, Volume 5, no. 3.

<sup>16</sup> "Afghan war is casting a long shadow." *IHT*, September 5-6, 2009, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

through additional changes, but that does not necessarily mean that the disquiet about the new surge will go away. As many observers have been pointing out, there have to be tangible signs that the new strategy will yield results for it to be accepted across the board. So far, the new troops have made it possible for NATO to gain some advantages on the battle-field and to secure some areas hitherto under the control of the Taliban. But these achievements have not been sufficient to really change the overall picture, and the troop increase during 2009 failed to calm things down. To really roll back the Taliban, there needs to be a continuous presence until reconstruction has reached such level that people feels it is sustainable. For this to be possible there has to be a sufficient number of reliable Afghan police and military that can take over the responsibility for security. Neither is present at the time of writing (December 2009) and will not be for several years to come. In fact, as late as December 8 2009, President Karzai said that Afghanistan would not be able to pay for its own security and national well-being until 2024.<sup>18</sup> Also, the administration is running up against the fact that these nation-building efforts are being done in one of the poorest, most tribalized countries in the world.<sup>19</sup>

As long as there is little progress being made in Afghanistan, criticism with the new strategy will probably continue to rise. To turn this around, there have to be credible gains, military and political. With no real defeat of the Taliban and with mounting criticism against President Karzai and his allies for election fraud, the outcome is far from certain, adding to the fear that neither the American public nor the President and Congressional leaders will have the stamina to see the mission through.

These sentiments are echoed by top-US military commanders both in Washington and in Afghanistan. In order to keep the momentum and to show that the war *is* winnable, the administration has to show that progress is being made, on all fronts. That is far from the case today. There are very few Afghan experts that report progress and as recently as in September 2009, Admiral Mike Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, described the military situation in Afghanistan as “*deteriorating*”.<sup>20</sup>

Admiral Mullen was referring to the military situation, but progress is as hard to detect in any other area of Afghanistan.

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<sup>18</sup> *IHT*, December 9, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> According to the Brookings Institution, only Somalia has a weaker state than Afghanistan.

<sup>20</sup> Op. cit., *IHT*, September 3, 2009, p. 4.

## 2.2 A stolen election?

*“No one will ever know how Afghans voted in their country’s presidential elections on Aug. 20, 2009”*

(Peter Galbraith, who served between June 1 and October 1, 2009, as deputy special representative of the Secretary General to the UN in Afghanistan. Quote from TIME, October 19, 2009, p. 26.)

The second reason for pessimism in regard to Afghanistan is the political situation. Presidential elections were held on August 20, 2009, and it was perhaps inevitable that, from the start, these elections were perceived as a success by the mere fact that they were held at all. But an analysis of the electoral turnout gives another picture. Threats by the Taliban to kill or maim anyone daring to cast a vote cast a spell over the elections and kept many people away from voting. This was most pronounced in the south and east of the country where the Taliban had gained the most influence, but other areas were also affected.

The overall turnout was estimated by independent officials to have been between 30 % and 40 %, less than the 70 % turnout in the 2004 presidential elections and also less than the 50 % turnout in the 2005 parliamentary elections.<sup>21</sup> A number of areas in the south, for example some districts of Kandahar and Helmand, were reported to have had an electoral turnout of below 5 %.<sup>22</sup> This was despite the big offensive launched by American, British and Afghan forces prior to the voting to regain territory and block the Taliban from disrupting the election. For example, in the town of Babaji, a town retaken during the Helmand campaign which cost the British a total of 37 dead and 150 wounded, only 150 people voted, out of 80,000 eligible voters.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that there were elections at all was not enough to change the fact that the overall picture in the country at large remained bleak. Almost as soon as the elections were over, reports and complaints of election fraud started to pour in to the Afghan Electoral Complaints Commission.<sup>24</sup> The most serious allegations published were against sitting President Karzai’s electoral machine. A couple of weeks after the elections, 2,615 complaints about vote stealing and other fraud had reached the Commission, and an undisclosed number of those were deemed serious enough to affect the overall outcome of the elections.<sup>25</sup> One of the more glaring – and now also proven – cases in point was how several thousands of

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew Wilder: *A House Divided? Analysing the 2005 Afghan Elections*, (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit: December 2005), p. 3

<sup>22</sup> Rashid, Ahmed, “The Afghanistan Impasse”, in *The New York Review of Books*, volume 56, number 15, October 8, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> See for example the *IHT*, September 5, 2009, (p.4), 7 (p.7), 8 (p.1).

<sup>25</sup> “In opponent’s territory, a unanimous vote for Karzai”, *IHT*, Wednesday, September 2, 2009, p. 4.

votes – all in favour of the incumbent President – had been sent to Kabul from areas where no one, or very few had actually voted out of fear of the Taliban.<sup>26</sup>

The President denied all charges of wrong-doing but the allegations still threw a dark cloud over his whole re-election campaign and can be expected to seriously taint his new administration. The electoral commission said that there were enough proven cases of fraud to merit a partial recount in certain districts. In fact, according to the electoral commission, so many votes (close to 1.5 million according to EU monitors) were cast under suspicious circumstances that the final election result was in question, rendering a second round unnecessary even before the withdrawal of election opponent Abdullah Abdullah.

The withdrawal of presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah gave Karzai another five years as President. However, the way in which that happened will continue to make it very difficult for the government in Kabul to gain any trust in the country at large, not to mention in the capitals of Europe and in Washington.

Before the elections, government representatives from a number of countries went to pains not to state any preferences for any specific candidate. Simultaneously, however, these same representatives pointed out that progress had been made over the past 8-10 months concerning corruption (especially in the Interior Ministry which is responsible for the Police), adding that they hoped that trend would continue. However, it is possible that this up-beat assessment of the achievements of Karzai's administration may have had more to do with a wish to encourage the Afghan government to pursue a certain line of policy.<sup>27</sup>

On the contrary, more and more people – experts and soldiers alike – are voicing fears that there is no credible Afghan partner with whom to build a future Afghanistan. One of the more senior voices to express such concerns is Anthony Cordesman, Professor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC. In an article in *The Washington Post* in September 2009 by Thomas Friedman, Cordesman is quoted as saying that what the Kabul government has been unable (or unwilling) to do so far will take “a significant number” of US forces (i.e. more reinforcements) to do. According to the article, progress is lacking in the creation of a reasonably corrupt-free government able to serve its people and work with the Americans and other involved countries in clearing out jihadis and weeding out the Taliban while at the same time justly distributing power to the federal Afghani system. According to Friedman, Cordesman also points out that the Afghan government had failed in all these tasks because it is “a grossly overcentralized government that is corrupt is often a

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<sup>26</sup> As an example of one of the more audacious attempts of ballot-stuffing see: “Fake ballots add to doubts on Afghan election”, *IHT*, September 8, p. 1, See also: *TIME*, October 19, 2009, p. 26-29.

<sup>27</sup> Op. cit. *IHT* September 3, 2009, p. 4.

tool of power-brokers and narco-traffickers, and lack basic capacity in virtually every ministry”.<sup>28</sup>

In this Cordesman was echoed by the US and NATO military Commander in Afghanistan, General McChrystal. In September 2009 *The Washington Post* reported that McChrystal had asked the president for more troops in order not to lose the battle in Afghanistan. According to the newspaper, McChrystal had in a secret document warned that failure to act would make it impossible to form a non-corrupt Afghan state, serving the people and, ultimately, maintaining order on its own.<sup>29</sup> McChrystal’s aim was to get enough Afghan police and military to clear areas of the Taliban and remnants of the international jihadis, and to not only hold such areas, but also to control them and build effective local government. In short, McChrystal called for a bigger indigenous army, a well-trained police, a solid court system, in addition to efficient public service.

Added to such problems is the difficulty in improving living conditions for the Afghan people in tandem with military gains. On this point indications from all the various military sources used for this study conform; in order to achieve victory it is an absolute necessity to show the Afghan people that siding with foreign forces and by extension the Afghans government in Kabul, against the Taliban is worth the effort. But even in the best of times this is a problem in a country with a strong tradition of violently opposing foreign troops. To gain the cooperation of the local community there have to be tangible improvements. And it is not enough to drill a well or build a school. The well must continue to function and the school must stay open also for coming generations. Ensuring positive and long-term effects for the local population is a key challenge in the pursuit of victory in Afghanistan. Only then can people be made to feel that they have a stake not only in working towards a better society but also in the effort to counter radicals.

In conclusion, instead of being a sorely needed sign of improvement, the 2009 elections further highlighted the corrupt state of Afghanistan’s political system and society in general. Even more troubling is the growing evidence that the low electoral turnout also was caused by a disillusionment of the Afghan people with development at large and the Afghan government in particular. It is questionable whether the elections really managed to convince anyone that the painstakingly shaped political process in Afghanistan is getting the country any closer to a real and lasting peace.

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<sup>28</sup> Op. cit. “Adopting Afghanistan”, *IHT*, September 7, 2009, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Bob Woodward: “McChrystal: More forces or ‘Mission Failure’; Top US Commander for Afghan War Call Next 12 months Decisive”, *The Washington Post*, September 21, 2009

## 2.3 A troop-surge to nowhere?

*“This is part of the daily grind: walking 15 km; carrying MREs, water, all the gear; fighting an unseen enemy.”*<sup>30</sup>

(Richard Lacayo, TIME, October 12, 2009, p.27)

This leads into the third reason or obstacle to real progress in Afghanistan; the lack of sufficient ‘boots on the ground’ to make a lasting difference. It has nearly become a conventional wisdom that in order for the Obama administration’s new strategy to work, more troops have to be deployed. That was also one of the requests of General McChrystal when he in September 2009 briefed the US government on the war in Afghanistan. One rationale for a troop increase, or surge, is that more troops would make development and reconstruction possible after any fighting has driven the Taliban away. An additional argument for more troops is that they would lessen the need for US and allied air strikes in support of troops on the ground (see below) and thus reduce the now rising number of Afghans killed in such strikes.

These arguments may be true, and there are indeed numerous examples from across Afghanistan where NATO forces have not been able to stay put and thus made it possible for the Taliban ‘to rule the night’. However, an increase in the number of troops also runs the risk of alienating the Afghan population since more troops raise the risk of confrontations. More troops also play right into the propaganda of the Taliban, who can rightly argue that the country, for all intents and purposes, remains under foreign occupation.

This is certainly something that both NATO and the US administration are aware of. US Defense Secretary Robert Gates said for example in the beginning of September – when receiving General McChrystal’s brief – that the “footprint” made by the foreign forces should not be “oversized” and that the nature of the footprint must be of the right kind, not alienating the Afghans.<sup>31</sup>

It is inevitable that more troops could very well trigger a backlash. For a surge to work, it is paramount that any military gains are immediately followed by real and lasting economic development. Any confluence of military and civilian tasks are bound to run up against the long-standing argument that these two parts of the mission should be kept separate, partly to protect civilian workers from retaliatory attacks. For at least the hard-core Taliban, this distinction is null and void anyway, since every foreigner is seen as an intruder who must be fought, regardless of whether he or she carries a gun or a spade.<sup>32</sup> But for the debates

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<sup>30</sup> Richard Lacayo, TIME, October 12, 2009, p. 27

<sup>31</sup> “Gates May Be Open To Troop Increase”, *The Washington Post*, September 4, 2009, web-edition,

<sup>32</sup> Op. cit., Norell, Magnus.

within the troop-contributing nations, it is a very pertinent question that will determine the stamina and staying-power of the mission.

In the longer run, it is equally important that the security forces mainly consist of reliable Afghan forces, trusted by the Afghan population. This, however, is something that even with the most optimistic assessments lies well ahead in the future. This, in turn, means that it may take a while before a surge would make any tangible impact in the fight against insurgents. Also, the assumption that because a surge worked in Iraq it will work in Afghanistan is not necessarily correct. In Iraq it was the Sunni population that asked for more US troops and aid in order for themselves to rid their societies of the Islamists, who in rather significant numbers had come from outside those same societies and communities. That is not the case in Afghanistan, where the Pashtun tribes make up the overwhelming bulk of the Taliban and are very much part of the society. Furthermore, there have been no requests from the Afghans for more foreign troops to enter the country.

As the debate on troop numbers gains momentum in and outside the US, an increasing number of Afghan experts and intelligence officials are speaking up against the surge.<sup>33</sup> This is true even after the formal surge decision was taken as part of the new December 2009 strategy. At the heart of their argument lies the understanding that an increase in troop numbers most likely will lead to more resentment from the Afghans.<sup>34</sup> The fear is simply that sending more troops into Pashtun areas may only galvanize people to back the Taliban in repelling the invaders, invaders that are also infidels. *New York Times* writer Nicholas D. Kristof in early September 2009 cited a group of concerned experts and intelligence officials as having stated: “the basic ignorance by our leadership is going to cause the deaths of many fine American troops with no positive outcome”.<sup>35</sup> What these commentators, and others, are saying is that if the fight is being escalated, it will help radicalize the Pashtuns even more, and not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan, leading to further instability in both countries.

What these critics see as the main way out of this dilemma, is for the US (and her allies) to quickly and decisively speed up training of the Afghan military and police. What they are in essence arguing for is not to pull out all troops. Rather, they are suggesting a much lighter military footprint limited to the training of Afghan forces and helping the Afghans to hold the major cities and ensure that hard-core Taliban’s do not regroup. These critics also maintain that lower troop numbers would be more politically sustainable in that it would allow the mission to go on for as long as it takes while at the same time reducing the amount of Afghan, American and allied blood spilled. To peel away support for the Taliban,

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<sup>33</sup> Op. cit., “Afghan war is casting a long shadow”, *IHT*, September 5-6, 2009, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> “The Afghanistan abyss”, *IHT*, September 8, 2009, p. 7,

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*.

this strategy of limiting the troop size needs to be coupled with heavy investment in education and development, including agriculture.<sup>36</sup>

This approach could be called state-building with a lighter touch. While daunting it would offer a more nuanced approach to the enemy. This point can not be overstated as the Taliban presents a much more complex foe than what is often acknowledged. It is fair to say that the American military has vastly improved its sensitivity to the setting and have managed to build much better relations with the Afghans over the years. But with increasing numbers of troops on the ground there are bound to be mistakes and the mission can ill afford much more of that, according to the critics.

It may be that the distance between what the Obama administration is striving to achieve and what the critics are saying is not that big. The real difference lies in the surge, with some critics saying that the troop increase is the actual problem.<sup>37</sup> By saying this, they are implying that the war can be won without many more troops by handing over the security responsibility to the Afghans. The goal of handing over the security responsibility to the Afghans themselves is not contested by either the Obama administration or commanders at the theater level in Afghanistan. But what they are arguing is that the process of empowering the Afghans will take much longer and cannot be done fast enough to render more troops unnecessary.

And this is the gist of the argument; to succeed with a strategy that all sides are in agreement on (handing over to the Afghans), but to agree on whether to do this with or without more troops. Tied to this argument are two key aspects of the fight. First is the fact that the Afghan political structure has not developed as was hoped. If the strategic goal of empowering the Afghans is to be achieved, there has to be a real Afghan partner to hand over to, and that is simply not the case today. With the contention surrounding the elections in August still simmering, the prospects for that to change in the short run are slim indeed. The goal is to build up a decent, non-corrupt Afghan state striving to achieve everything the Taliban-regime did not; i.e. respect for the rule of law, women's rights, a decent educational system for boys *and* girls and an injection into society of true democratic values. With the present Afghan government, that is not happening, at least not fast enough to win over the Afghan people. If that is what the surge eventually is supposed to achieve, it will take a very long time. The US government is currently struggling with the very idea of how a troop surge

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<sup>36</sup> An advocate for this strategy is, among others, Vice-President Joe Biden, who has been arguing against a large troop-increase. He is, however, on record as supporting Obama in implementing the strategy outlined in the speech on December 1.

<sup>37</sup> Again, one of those critics is Vice President Joe Biden, who is also on record as saying that the US should scale down its troops, not increase the amount.

should be carried out in light of the fact that the war is becoming less and less popular.<sup>38</sup>

The second key aspect concerns how the actual combat (against the Taliban and also against remnants of the international jihadis) is conducted and what role foreign troops should have. To make matters worse there are tensions within ISAF/NATO forces concerning national troop mandates. Many NATO and ISAF nations have imposed various limitations on troop operations and conduct, so called caveats, as prerequisites for sending troops to Afghanistan. This creates asymmetries and problems of coordination.

It is uncontested that the bulk of combat operations are conducted by American, British and Canadian forces operating under the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). These countries have also taken the heaviest casualties.<sup>39</sup> By early February 2010, the US had suffered 986 casualties, the UK 256 and Canada 139.<sup>40</sup> If casualties are used as an indicator of which troops contribute most to combat operations in either NATO/ISAF or OEF, France (39 casualties), Germany (34), Denmark (31), Spain (28), Italy (22), the Netherlands (21) and Poland (16) followed on the list.<sup>41</sup> There has been a constant, although often low-key, US and British prodding of their NATO-allies to pick up a heavier load of the combat. This, however, has run up against the fact that, on the whole, European public opinion has become increasingly resentful of sending more troops to Afghanistan for what is viewed as a difficult-to-see end goal.<sup>42</sup> This has made other NATO countries wary of committing more troops to the unruly south and east of Afghanistan. And in cases when they do decide to increase their troop contribution, they include numerous caveats and conditions to ensure that those troops will be kept out of harms way. This may change, however, as less and less areas of Afghanistan can be considered 'safe' from attacks. The hitherto rather quiet north, for example, has in recent years seen a steady number of attacks and an infiltration of Taliban fighters, rendering the mission increasingly difficult.

With the decision taken in Washington to increase troop levels, also the UK and Canada were quick to promise more troops. And at a NATO meeting in early December 2009 (just after President Obama's speech at West Point) the Secretary-General of NATO, Anders Fogh-Rasmussen promised 7,000 additional

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<sup>38</sup> A recent poll by CNN/Opinion Research Corp. in September showed that support for the war is slipping among the US population. Just 39 % supported the war, down from 53 % in April 2009. *TIME*, September 28, 2009, p. 25.

<sup>39</sup> Another burden that the US taxpayers carry is the fact that the Afghan war now cost about \$4 billion/month, a hefty sum even if there was no economic recession.

<sup>40</sup> 'Operation Enduring Freedom', *iCasualties.org*, downloaded on February 8, 2010 from [www.icasualties.org/OEF/index.aspx](http://www.icasualties.org/OEF/index.aspx)

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Op. cit.*, *IHT*, September 5-6, p.2. See also *TIME*, September 28, 2009, p. 24-25.

NATO troops, not counting any possible contributions from France and Germany.

But the tension is there, and will likely be a bone of contention for as long as the mission goes on. A way to square that circle – and at the same time lessen the gap between the administration and its critics concerning the surge – is to use Afghan forces on a far larger scale than has been the case up until now. If that is to be done faster than the present pace of training makes allowance for, other means must be utilized.

An argument heard increasingly from military leaders (be they staff officers in the US or local commanders on the scene in Afghanistan) is that in a counterinsurgency fight like the one in Afghanistan, quality often beats quantity. In fact, too much emphasis on quantity often leads to a decline in quality. This also ties in with the present discussion concerning the surge. Dennis Blair, the director of national intelligence, has reportedly used troop numbers based on the size of the Afghan population with a ratio of 25 soldiers for every 1,000 Afghans.<sup>43</sup> His argument is that by increasing the troop strength by a certain percentage, the counterinsurgency capacity will increase by the same amount. This is correct as far as American troops are concerned, since they, for the most part, are well-trained and well-led. But the logic will not necessarily work when looking at Afghan forces, since these have not, by a long shot, reached the same level when it comes to training. Doubling the Afghan troop strength will therefore not automatically generate an equivalent increase in COIN capacity. Historically, it takes about 10 years to turn raw recruits into officers suitable for efficient COIN operations.<sup>44</sup> Hence, a rapid increase in the size of Afghan security forces (including the police) could even lead to a deterioration of the COIN war now being fought in Afghanistan. This is because there are simply too few sufficiently trained Afghan officers in the police and in the military to efficiently lead the forces. That problem is exacerbated by the fact that with few good and well-trained officers spread too thin, the fighting quality goes down. In addition, poorly-trained and poorly-led troops more often misbehave and thus run the risk of alienating the population. They also tend to desert or defect. All of which are current problems in Afghanistan.

Big improvements in Afghan officer quality are, hence, several years away, and yet, a growing number of politicians (in the US as well as other troop-contributing countries) are demanding progress on this front in only 18-24 months. Consequently, for the surge to be successful while at the same time

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<sup>43</sup> Mark Moyar, Professor of National Security Affairs at the USMC University and author of the forthcoming book: *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq*, In “Can the U.S. Lead Afghans?” *The New York Times*, September 3, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

transferring much of the combat to the Afghans, there are a number of steps that need to be taken in the short run.

First, the allies must pressure Afghan authorities to weed out bad commanders, commanders who have been appointed on the basis of kinship ties in line with the cronyism and nepotism that still plague Afghanistan. Secondly, the allies need to step and speed up the training of Afghan officers and assign many more of their own officers and of a higher quality to advise Afghan units. This is a process that the Obama administration has embraced as one of the key issues for turning around the fight in Afghanistan. Tied to this, there needs to be even more and better coordination between allied (primarily US) forces and Afghan units.

These measures, however, will probably not be sufficient, at least not in the short run. A more drastic step would be for the US and her allies to get directly involved in the process of selecting the commanders.<sup>45</sup> However given the likely political difficulties with this approach, there is yet another option that the US has in order to even out the odds and make the surge work, and that is to have foreigners directly commanding Afghan forces. This would be the fastest way to ensure increased troop quality and quantity simultaneously. Of all the various steps being discussed, this would be the most drastic one.

Having US and other foreigners commanding Afghan forces is obviously a very sensitive issue. It would in all likelihood open up for allegations of neo-colonialism and could as a result also slow down the process of recruiting and developing indigenous forces.<sup>46</sup> However, taking into consideration what is at stake here, the short-term benefits might justify the long-term costs if – as is the case right now – the indigenous commanders are grossly incapable and the political realities demand rapid progress.

President Obama's decision, presented in December 2009, on how to proceed was urgently needed, for the Afghans, the US military and allies alike. It was not an easy decision whether to send additional troops into the ever worsening situation in Afghanistan. And it was – as H.D.S. Greenway wrote in *IHT* on September 23<sup>47</sup> – Obama's "Henry the V moment",<sup>48</sup> having to decide on which way to go. And developments in Afghanistan can still go wrong; as former CIA

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<sup>45</sup> The US did this with a certain amount of success in Vietnam with the so called *Provisional Reconnaissance Units*. By appointing the units' indigenous commanding officers, the US (in the form of the CIA) were able to sidestep the political and other non-merit considerations that plagued the South Vietnamese Army at the time.

<sup>46</sup> There are numerous examples of where this approach has been rather successful as a COIN strategy. The US fought, and won, an insurrection in the Philippines between 1899-1902, using this approach. A more recent example is the British campaign in Malay in the mid-1960s.

<sup>47</sup> Op. cit, *IHT*, September 23, 2009. p 8.

<sup>48</sup> At the eve of the battle of Agincourt in 1415, Shakespeare has the King arguing with the Earl of Westmoreland about what the "happy few" and "band of Brothers" might do against the more numerous French.

station chief in Kabul, Graham Fuller, wrote in December 2009, “There are no good choices. Obama has only kicked the can down the road”.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, building efficient Afghan police and military capacity is paramount in winning the war in Afghanistan.<sup>50</sup> Too few boots on the ground has, so far, led to a ‘push-button’ way of fighting terror (see below on air strikes). What is needed is a ‘down and dirty’ approach and one with an emphasis on Afghan forces. Since the surge, even if it is efficient enough in the short run, cannot be sustained in the long run, a different take is needed from the allies. General McChrystal has acknowledged as much. It remains to be seen whether that understanding can be translated into operational tactics on the killing fields of Afghanistan.

## 2.4 Air strikes – killing friends while killing foes

*“Targeting civilian men and women is not acceptable”*

(A statement from President Hamid Karzai after an air strike killed at least 80 people near Kunduz on September 4, 2009.<sup>51</sup>)

The fourth reason or obstacle to winning the war in Afghanistan ties in with the way the war has been conducted. As a substitute for the lacking number of troops on the ground, so called ‘push-button’ warfare has been conducted, using air power and even high-altitude bombing. This use of not-so-precise bombing and air power which have repeatedly killed civilians in large numbers has ignited an overall feeling of anger and estrangement towards the Western powers, ostensibly there to help.<sup>52</sup> Regardless of whether published figures of civilian deaths are correct or not, there is a widespread feeling that this constitutes a clumsy and inefficient way of doing COIN.<sup>53</sup>

This criticism is something that commanders and soldiers on the ground are well aware of. After all, they are on the receiving end of the criticism, voiced by people who are not necessarily friends of the Taliban, but who are finding it very difficult to forgive the deaths of family and neighbours. General McChrystal highlighted the seriousness of the problem when already in June – shortly after

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<sup>49</sup> *IHT*, December 4, p 8.

<sup>50</sup> The target is for the Afghan army to have 240,000 troops and for the Afghan Police to have 160,000. A number that will not be reached before 2014, if it can be reached at all.

<sup>51</sup> *IHT*, September 5, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> There is an on-going debate about the figures of dead and wounded Afghans as result of allied air-strikes. The figures used and presented here are both from official military sources as well as from their critics.

<sup>53</sup> The author, during visits to Afghanistan and Pakistan as early as 2005 and 2006, talking to Afghans across the political spectrum, got a near unanimous picture of how this tactic backfired and created new enemies.

having taken command – he said: “Air power contains the seeds of our own destruction if we do not use it responsibly, we can lose this fight”.<sup>54</sup>

The new strategy that McChrystal and his team have been tasked with – building a reasonably non-corrupt Afghan state that can partner with the allies in defeating both drug lords and the Taliban-led insurgency – constantly collides with the negative blowback created when civilians are killed in air attacks.

An air strike shortly before dawn on September 4, 2009, epitomizes the problems with allied air attacks and the way they are often carried out and ordered. In this case, German forces on the ground called in a strike after Taliban fighters had hijacked two fuel trucks. The attack destroyed the tankers and killed around 80 civilians who were trying to siphon off fuel from the trucks.<sup>55</sup> According to the new rules of engagement, presented by General McChrystal when he assumed command, NATO air strikes will mainly be allowed only if allied forces are in danger of being overrun by enemy fighters. Even in the case of firefights with insurgency forces, air strikes will only be allowed on a limited scale if the combat is occurring in populated areas. From reports of the incident, it appears that none of the necessary conditions were present when the Germans called in the strike. NATO commanders on the scene can order air strikes if the need arises, which is operationally reasonable. But even when the right conditions are met, there is a risk that non-combatant civilians are killed. Furthermore, it is obviously impossible to allow the pilots to second-guess commanders on the ground.

Several actors are involved when air strikes are ordered (from the commanders on the scene to air-force command). That can and should work as a barrier to faulty decisions and unnecessary civilian deaths. But it is increasingly clear that the number of killed civilians shows that the current system of checks and balances is not working properly. It is possible that this can be attributed to the troops on the ground being too few and/or too reliant on bad intelligence. But it can also be a consequence of the many national commands that are active in the Afghan theater of operation, commands that are not always acting in a coordinated and systematic way.

The problem with coordination between the national components of the multi-national coalition force was pointed out in a not-so-veiled critique by general McChrystal himself in his 66-page assessment of how the war is going, presented on August 30 2009. Among other things, McChrystal said that coalition commands’ “subordinate headquarters must stop fighting separate campaigns”.<sup>56</sup> Even before that report, McChrystal had said he wanted to unify the efforts of American allies and ask them for more troops, money and training. At the end of

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<sup>54</sup> “80 Afghans killed in NATO airstrike”, *IHT*, September 5, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Op. cit, *IHT*, September 5-6, p 1.

<sup>56</sup> “General warns of Afghan ‘failure’ without more troops”, *IHT*, September 22, 2009, p. 4.

2009, US troop strength stood at some 68,000, with an additional 38,000 from other troop-contributing NATO countries. But the non-American NATO forces operate very differently depending on various restrictions their national governments have placed on their use. This has led to persistent tensions between countries providing combat troops. Given that adding more non-US troops is, as outlined above, one of the key pieces in the new US strategy, such tensions could continue and potentially complicate efforts.

The call for allies to contribute more troops will, however, probably be a very hard sell for the US administration. The war in Afghanistan is already deeply unpopular in Europe, even in countries that provide troops to ISAF.<sup>57</sup> The death in September 2009 of six Italian soldiers in a suicide bombing in Kabul (that also killed 10 Afghans) is a case in point. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has long been a staunch ally of the US effort in Afghanistan, already during the Bush administration. But after the death of the Italian soldiers, Berlusconi called for a “transition strategy”, calling for the Afghan government to have a larger role in providing security for its own citizens. Compared to the over 840 US soldiers who at the time of writing (December 2009) had been killed in Afghanistan, the Europeans have lost very few. However, as a proportion of the total numbers deployed, European casualties have been considerable.<sup>58</sup> And as casualties continue to rise, questions continue to pop up not only about the way the war is going, but also on whether it is really the ‘good war’ it was once seen to be.

It is well known that any transition strategy is doomed to fail if pursued too fast and implemented too early (as pointed out above). This is of course common knowledge also in Europe, but as the pressure rises on governments to scale back their involvement in Afghanistan (not only combat duty), difficulties rise in trying to recruit and send additional troops. As a consequence, more restrictions are put in place on the soldiers already deployed, which leads to more tensions within the diminishing group of countries contributing combat troops.

There is also the old ghost of mission creep. As long as the overall mission is unclear – or at least not fully explained to the populations of the countries providing the troops – the danger is that unclear strategic goals will continue to lead to with mission creep. A case in point is the rising tension in the hitherto rather combat-free north of Afghanistan, where troops, for example Germans and Swedes, are mainly deployed as nation-builders rather than combat soldiers. But as the Taliban is moving into the thus far relatively peaceful north, these forces are finding themselves increasingly more often in situations where they might have to fight a real war.

With these tensions in mind, and the accompanying problems of lacking coordination between ISAF forces, McChrystal, in his assessment, wrote that

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<sup>57</sup> Op. cit, *TIME*, September, 2009, p. 24-25.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p. 25 for table of troop contributions and causality-list.

ISAF “must adopt a fundamentally new approach including a more coherent unity of command”.<sup>59</sup> The above mentioned new and more strict guidelines for using air strikes have now been in use for several months, but it may be too soon to properly assess whether they work or not. The insistence on more and better coordination, as well as US pressure on its allies to provide additional combat troops, are meant to remedy the fact that, as the General wrote, coalition forces have “operated in a manner that distances us – physically and psychologically – from the people we seek to protect”.<sup>60</sup> In admittance that air strikes are taking an intolerable toll on civilian non-combatants, the assessment also said that “In addition, we run the risk of strategic defeat by pursuing tactical wins that cause civilian casualties or unnecessary collateral damage”.<sup>61</sup>

Overall, General McChrystal’s new strategic approach relies on the coalition providing more troops in the short run, on the speeding up of training of Afghan forces (police and military alike) and on finding creative ways of working with Afghan forces already in place. McChrystal writes in the assessment that the coalition has been hindered by an “overreliance on firepower and force protection”.<sup>62</sup> This has needlessly hurt the coalition’s legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghans. In short, the coalition needs to show that it is not only fighting the Taliban and remnants of the international jihadis (such as al Qaeda), it also needs to show that it is fighting for the defense of the Afghan people.

For many observers, one of the hardest nuts to crack in winning the military fight as well as the hearts and minds campaign lies in separating the insurgency – that many Afghans do not necessarily support – from the population at large. This is especially true for the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan where Pashtuns make up the majority, i.e. in the borderland between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This border area has seen more combat since the war began in 2001 than any other part of Afghanistan. It has also seen more air strikes than other areas, with more civilian casualties to boot. To truly win in Afghanistan, the Pashtuns along the Durand Line have to be won over and insurgents weeded out.

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<sup>59</sup> Op. cit. *IHT*, September 22.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> In short, the use of air-power, as a consequence of too few troops, is also a result of the way the insurgents have been using Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) to such an effect. First coming into use in Iraq, IED’s killed a large number of soldiers. The Taliban in Afghanistan and in Pakistan has learned the technique and IED’s are the number one reason for deaths in Afghanistan among the troops. Calling in air-strikes has been a consequence of a much more cautious approach when protection has been lacking. However, there are efficient and good equipment such as Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles (MRAP). In Iraq these have reduced fatalities through IED’s and road-side bombs were down 99 % last year due to MRAP’s. Once introduced in Afghanistan (both as vehicles and as protective vests for soldiers to wear) that can be a real alternative to the air-strikes. *Jerusalem Report*, September 29, 2009.

## 2.5 Two countries – one people: the Pashtuns straddling the Durand Line

*“They are amongst the most miserable and brutal creatures of the earth”*

(Winston Churchill, 1897.<sup>63</sup>)

The long border between Afghanistan and Pakistan stretches for 2,640 kilometres along some of the most mountainous and difficult terrain in Central Asia. The border is called the Durand Line after then British Foreign Secretary of India Mortimer Durand,<sup>64</sup> who, on November 12, 1893, signed the Durand Line Agreement with Emir Abdur Rahman Khan of Afghanistan. The agreement was meant to demarcate the border between British India and Afghanistan.<sup>65</sup> Today, the border runs along the Pakistani province of Baluchistan in the south to the North-West Frontier Province in the north with the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in between.

The area through which the border runs has been inhabited by the Pashtun people since at least the time of Alexander the Great. The first recorded mentioning of the Pashtuns is from the Greek historian Herodotus who, in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE, writes about a people he called *Pactyans* and who lived on the eastern frontier of the Persian governorate of *Arachosia*, a part of the Persian Empire that today roughly corresponds to south-eastern Afghanistan and south-western Pakistan. They were Islamized in the 7<sup>th</sup> century when the Arabs invaded, and the area – Pashtunistan – became a part of various Islamic empires.

During the British rule of India, there were constant troubles along the border areas and the British tried, in vain as it were, to defeat the Pashtun tribes along the border.<sup>66</sup> The border negotiations in 1893 were meant to resolve those constantly occurring border skirmishes and once and for all settle the border. Talks were only partly successful and the fact that today’s Pashtuns still live and have kin on both sides of the border, keeps the issue open. One immediate result of the agreement of November 1893 was that a whole new province of British India was created; the North-West Frontier Province, that was carved out of newly annexed Afghan provinces. This included what is today the FATA area, which was meant to be a buffer area between British and Afghan spheres of interests. The fact that the agreement was only written in English – a language that Emir Abdur Rahman Khan did not read nor understand – and the fact that

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<sup>63</sup> Quote from *Soldiers of God*, Kaplan, Robert D. p. 94

<sup>64</sup> Durand was Indian foreign secretary between 1884 and 1894.

<sup>65</sup> See, *The Durand Line-its geo-strategic importance*, by Azmat Hayat Khan, edited by M.Y.Effendi, Area Study Centre Peshawar, University of Peshawar and Hanns Seidel Foundation, Islamabad, 2002.

<sup>66</sup> For an excellent overview of the disastrous first Afghan war in 1841, see: Waller, John H, *Beyond the Khyber Pass, the road to British Disaster in the First Afghan War*, Random House, NY, 1990.

these areas of FATA had been Afghan for at least a thousand years, ensured that the tension and conflicts concerning the border would not go away. As early as 1949, the Afghan National Assembly declared the Durand agreement invalid, with the argument that since British India ceased to exist in 1947, any agreement it had passed and signed could no longer be valid.<sup>67</sup>

The tension remains to this day and has continued to haunt relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan and, thus, also creating headaches for the allies in ISAF. Since the border divides the Pashtuns, it has been the rule that the border was never very carefully guarded. Goods and people have been allowed to cross back and forth and the set-up of FATA included clauses to that effect.<sup>68</sup> The downside is of course that there is no real control over who passes across the border, except in various places where there are proper border posts. Furthermore, most Pashtuns do not recognize the Durand Line at all, something that plays right into the hands of the insurgents, be they Taliban or international jihadis.

Adding insult to injury towards the Pashtuns, the war in Afghanistan is spilling over into Pakistan and with that a rising foreign “foot print” in the area with NATO weapons hitting targets in Pakistan. Even when such strikes are done with the consent of the Pakistani government, they are viewed by the Pashtuns living in the area as an affront to their independence. This point of contention is something new, since previous Pakistani governments did not allow such operations.

The feeling among many Pashtuns that they are unfairly targeted was exacerbated by the fact that the war was triggered by acts (9/11) perpetrated by foreigners, namely Arabs of various jihadi outfits. War in Afghanistan has historically been conducted to stop or hinder what other powers might do in the country, not what Afghanistan itself might do. For example, during the period known as “The Great Game”<sup>69</sup>, it was British fear of Russian influence in Afghanistan and western India (today Pakistan) that led to invasions of Afghanistan. In 1979, when the Russians invaded, it was the Americans who wrapped themselves in the mantle of the Great Game and started to arm Afghans (through the Pakistanis). It took nine years before the Russians left. And in this century the invaders were Arabs, triggering the war in the autumn of 2001 and the subsequent chaos that followed. Presented as a war of necessity at the time, the invasion itself was a pushover. But with the Taliban and the Arabs (and other

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<sup>67</sup> This argument, however, has no real effect. By consensus, world courts tend to uphold agreements from colonial times through a term called *uti possiditis juris*, i.e. binding bilateral agreements with or between colonial powers are passed down to successor sovereign states. To have any effect, boundary changes must be made bilaterally.

<sup>68</sup> Op. cit, Norell.

<sup>69</sup> For a somewhat different, but excellently written, piece on that period, Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, is highly recommended.

foreigners in the international jihadi movement) slipping across the border to Pakistan to recuperate and choose their fights, the US, as had the British and Russians before them, discovered that the problem with Afghanistan was not so much necessarily getting in, but getting out. And a major reason for that is the Pashtuns who live along both sides of the Durand Line and who provide support to the insurgents.

So the fifth main obstacle to peace and a successful outcome of the war in Afghanistan lies, in no small part, in Pakistan, and the support for the Taliban insurgents coming from the Pashtun people living on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

For more than 250 years – from 1747 when the Durrani Empire came into being – the Pashtuns have dominated politics in Afghanistan, where they constitute the largest ethnic group. Pashtuns were for a long time often called Afghans, thus intermingling the two terms. For the Pashtuns, Afghan refers to a common legendary ancestor known as *Afghana*. Since the Durrani Empire, which was also when ‘modern’ Afghanistan was born, the country has always been ruled by Pashtuns. In Pakistan the Pashtuns are the second largest ethnic group and they are prominent in for example the military.

The fact that the various Pashtun tribes, for the most part of their long existence, have been living in an area without national borders, is today contributing to the difficulties along the Durand Line. And when the Taliban first started to appear on the Afghan scene after the end of the Soviet defeat there, it was from the start a Pashtun movement. There have been very few prominent Taliban leaders from outside the Pashtun community and much of the current insurgency is based on perceived (if not real) slights towards the Pashtuns perpetrated by other ethnic groups in Afghanistan.<sup>70</sup> The support the Taliban has received from various sources in Pakistan has been based on leading Pakistani officials’ belief that it is in Pakistan’s interest to have a solid, and controllable, partner calling the shots in Afghanistan, not the least as a way to counter Indian influence. Furthermore, there has been a general consensus that such partner must be Pashtun.<sup>71</sup> This explains, to a large extent, why Pakistani support for the Taliban has been consistent over time. It is no exaggeration to say that this point of contention between the Pakistanis, on the one side, and the US and her allies, on the other, will be one of the hardest problems to solve.

In short, the Pakistani military should not be expected to change its strategy of selectively supporting Islamic extremists, a strategy which is designed both to

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<sup>70</sup> Rashid, Ahmed, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, Yale University Press, 2001.

<sup>71</sup> Op. cit, Norell. Also, during the author’s travels in Pakistan, it has been a constant message from various officials (military and civil alike) that it is simply inconceivable that anyone but the Pashtuns should rule Afghanistan.

counter India in Kashmir and to gain and keep influence in Afghanistan. This was brought home very clearly when the most wanted of the Taliban leaders, Baitullah Mehsud, was killed by an unmanned drone on August 5, 2009, in South Waziristan.<sup>72</sup> His death triggered an internal fight for his succession, but in late August the new leadership was installed after a process heavily influenced by the Afghan Taliban (Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar – who is by most accounts believed to be based in Quetta, Pakistan – was very close to Baitullah). In early October, on the eve of the much-anticipated Pakistani offensive in the area, the new leadership of the Pakistani Taliban met the press.<sup>73</sup> The new top leader, Hakimullah Mehsud, at the meeting promised new bombing attacks. Just a few days later, a suicide bomber struck the United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) office in an upscale neighbourhood of Islamabad.<sup>74</sup>

The meeting with the journalists could hardly have been announced in advance without at least the tacit support of some parts of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). For a long time, the Pakistani army and intelligence agencies have used, and supported, the Afghan Taliban, and often looked the other way when it came to both the Pakistani and the Afghan Taliban in their Pashtun homelands along the Durand Line. For example, in North Waziristan, two key Afghan Taliban networks – one led by Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son Sirajuddin and the other by long-time Islamist warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar – have been on the ISI payroll for several decades.<sup>75</sup> The Pakistani army and the ISI may have tried to distinguish between the Taliban and their Arab jihadi backers, but the Taliban themselves have never done this. This means that a rather powerful alliance of various networks has been created on both sides of the border. It has also made it imperative to eliminate these networks if the Afghan mission is to be successfully brought to an end. A key is therefore to persuade the Pakistani military and intelligence agency to turn decisively against the Taliban, and not only the jihadis, on both sides of the border. However, as long as the Pakistani army considers the Afghan Taliban a strategic asset in the rivalry with India and other regional actors, such policy change is far from assured.

After injections of additional troops, the allied strength now totals nearly 100,000 troops in Afghanistan, of which the bulk are fighting the Taliban insurgency in the east and south, in Pashtun lands. With peace and stability seemingly no closer, there is an overall feeling across the region that the West may lose faith in this war and start to pull out sooner rather than later. If this would come to pass before the Afghan forces are ready to take on the fight themselves or, even more

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<sup>72</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7163626.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7163626.stm)

<sup>73</sup> *IHT*, October 6, 2009, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* Since then, during October and November, several more attacks perpetrated by the TTP and its allies, has been directed towards targets in Pakistan. This includes attacks against the Pakistani military but also against civilian targets such as markets.

<sup>75</sup> *Op. cit.*, Rashid, Ahmed, "The Afghanistan Impasse", in *The New York Review of Books*,

important, if such pull-out would happen before the Kabul government is considered truly accountable and representative by the Afghans, it would most likely result in the Taliban coming back in full force. And even if the Taliban would not re-enter Kabul, they would be in a position to influence and drive politics in Afghanistan. They would also be in a position to “liberate” parts of Afghanistan. It is of interest to note that the Taliban may be helped by the new proposed strategy from Washington. While no final decision has been taken at the time of writing, the re-organization of US forces may involve the repositioning of troops from more isolated posts (such as the remote Nuristan district) to more populous districts. That would certainly leave the Taliban with a propaganda victory and it would also let down Afghans in those remote areas and who are not keen on seeing a Taliban comeback. Thus, the Taliban’s “game-plan” of waiting out the Americans and her allies might work.

Furthermore, if this scenario were to occur in the next year or so (which is likely considering the debate both in the US and Europe as well as the timeline presented by Obama in December, 2009), the Taliban in Pakistan would be in a position to wrest even more areas from the Islamabad government’s writ.<sup>76</sup> It is imperative that also the situation in the Pakistani tribal areas is dealt with in order to sort out the situation in Afghanistan. It is impossible to neglect the Pashtuns in Pakistan in this equation. The sanctuaries in Pakistan now used extensively by both the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban need to be dismantled and eliminated. This cannot be done by the Pakistani military alone. And even if they were able to deal with it militarily, the political, economic and social situation in the Pashtun areas also needs to be addressed.<sup>77</sup>

These difficulties are compounded by the fact that the militants can still, with near impunity, strike pretty much everywhere that they want, and that includes inside the capital. Several attacks in October and November, 2009, bear this out. For example, on October 5, a suicide attack against the Islamabad office of the UNWFP killed several people. Five days later, in a bold attack, militants from the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)<sup>78</sup> and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi took hostages inside the military headquarters in Rawalpindi, killing 23 people and setting off a

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<sup>76</sup> As an example of how difficult it is for the Islamabad government to deal with their own Taliban, one can look at the situation in the Swat-valley. Several months after the fighting ended (and the military stating that the militants in the Swat were defeated), re-construction has not began in many areas and no major Taliban-leader has been killed or captured, leaving virtually the whole structure intact. In addition, in October several suicide-attacks took place in the Swat and in the Shangla district, killing scores of people. Responsibility for these attacks was taken by the Pakistani Taliban with help from militants from the terror-networks *Lahkar-e-Jhangvi* and *Lashkar-e-taibe*.

<sup>77</sup> Op. cit, Norell (ed). *Militancy in the Pakistani Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Afghanistan*. FOI-Report (FOI-R--2727--SE), Stockholm, October, 2009.

<sup>78</sup> TTP – also known as the Pakistani Taliban – is the main Taliban militant umbrella group in Pakistan.

20 hour siege.<sup>79</sup> Attacks in Lahore and Islamabad as well as in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), targeting the police, the military (including training schools for special forces) and outdoor markets, have shown the prowess and adaptability of the TTP in catching the Pakistani authorities off-guard. That so many attacks occurred in October was due to the army's offensive (announced months ahead) in South Waziristan (in FATA). Targeting Pakistani cities like Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad was a way for the TTP to strike back at the authorities and try to ease the pressure against the TTP strongholds in FATA.

The tight bonds between the Taliban of Afghanistan and the Taliban of Pakistan, very much a consequence of their shared ethnic Pashtun heritage and traditions, also explains how the Afghan insurgency can keep functioning despite some heavy pounding by the allies. According to General McChrystal's report, the Afghan Taliban leadership is operating out of the Pakistani city of Quetta in Baluchistan, a province with its own long-simmering insurgency. This safe haven has enabled Mullah Omar and his aides to appoint shadow governors in nearly all Afghan provinces. This shadow government has been able to levy taxes and establish Sharia courts. Simultaneously, the Afghan government has been losing more and more of its ability to function, due to corruption and the assertive insurgency. The resulting lack of government service (of any kind) and tangible re-construction outside of Kabul have played right into the hands of the insurgency. The sanctuaries in Pakistan are thus enabling the Afghan Taliban to spread the insurgency to areas of Afghanistan outside the Pashtun core lands in the south and in the east.

As pointed out above, this issue is often raised by US officials in their talks with their Pakistani colleagues. However, in Pakistan, it is a sensitive matter to go after the Afghan Taliban, especially in Quetta as it might incite public anger throughout Baluchistan. The importance of the Afghan Taliban shura (leadership council) in Quetta is also down-played by the Pakistani military. It is true that the objective of the string of attacks against US and UN forces across Afghanistan also is to give an impression that the insurgency is everywhere. It is information warfare that the Taliban is skilfully utilizing. But that does not really make it any less important. The Taliban do not really have to win. It is enough that they do not lose. As long as they can keep some pressure on and continue with their attacks throughout the country, the allies are kept on their toes and reconstruction is disrupted.

The ancient ties among the Pashtuns long pre-date a border drawn up by British colonial officials and an Afghan Emir some hundred years ago. These ties are

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<sup>79</sup> According to a spokesperson for the TTP, the attack against the HQ was in retaliation for the killing of Baitullah Mehsud and would be followed by more attacks unless the military called off their plans for an offensive in South Waziristan in the FATA. *IHT*, October 13, p.1, *Militants press their assault on Pakistan*.

still strong and they have added a complicating factor, also involving e.g. illegal trade, to the difficulties in fighting the insurgency. Thus, the key lies in the rugged and mountainous lands along both sides of the Durand Line. The challenge (unsolved so far) is to fuse a coherent policy in which the national interests of both Pakistan and Afghanistan are taken into account at the same time as the insurgency in both countries are dealt with.

## 2.6 Fighting for money – the ‘criminalization’ of the Taliban

*“Much of the enemy force is drawn from the ranks of unemployed men looking for wages to support their families”*

(General Karl Eikenberry, former commander of US forces in Afghanistan and currently US ambassador to Afghanistan, to Congress in 2007.<sup>80</sup>).

In late August 2009, the Afghan and US governments announced that they would start a new policy of paying tribal militias to provide security in Afghanistan. This was seen as a stop-gap solution until the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP) would be up to par and able to take over the main responsibility for security in the country, something that will take several years at best (see above). This strategy mirrors what the British tried at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to calm things down in the Pashtun tribal areas. That did not work out as intended but created a situation whereby the Pakistani governments (after independence from the British in 1947) for a long period of time were forced to continue this system. It also created the present situation in FATA, where normal Pakistani law does not apply but government appointed tribal chiefs (Maliks) and governors’ rule more or less completely independent from any oversight.<sup>81</sup>

The new strategy of funding local militias is very likely to produce similar unintended consequences and only create more confusion and local corruption without in any real sense stopping or seriously hindering the insurgents. In fact, to an extent, that has already happened, since the new strategy is not really ‘new’ as much as it is an official stamp of approval on a policy already being implemented.<sup>82</sup> What the strategy created was a new set of local power brokers which, in turn, created new conflicts within the tribes themselves. This was a tactic that backfired with the British and that is already showing signs of backfiring with the allies in Afghanistan.<sup>83</sup> For the people left out of the deal, it

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<sup>80</sup> *IHT*, September 4, 2009, p. 6

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Op. cit* Norell, *The Taliban and the MMA*.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

might now look like a good idea to join the insurgency, whose leadership is paid a decent salary.

This is especially true in a situation like the one in Afghanistan where unemployment is currently running in double digits and, according to the UN; much of the population is malnourished.<sup>84</sup> The lack of jobs, which is in turn due to the lack of stability and security, make for a good recruiting base for the insurgency. This is not to underestimate the importance and strength of the religious and ideological underpinnings of the Taliban insurgency – they are real enough. And in the tribal areas, straddling the Durand Line, anger and resentment with foreign troops plays a major role in any decision to aid the Taliban. Again, it is important to remember that the Taliban is, overwhelmingly, an ethnic Pashtun movement. However, it is equally true that for a considerable number of insurgency fighters, the lack of alternatives plays a major role.

Added to a dire economic situation with lacking development, unemployment and an insurgency closely married to a nationalistic Pashtun sense of grievance, is the illegal drug trade. The illegal drug trade has ballooned since 2001 and today 93 % of the world's heroin comes from Afghanistan.<sup>85</sup> Opium sales are on the increase, which has created numerous opportunities for the Taliban to take a cut on sales and the drug traffic.<sup>86</sup> That this has been going on under the noses of tens of thousands of foreign troops is explained by the fact that the drug trade was never considered as important as going after the jihadists and their Taliban backers. This was a serious oversight and today, with many farmers having switched to opium for economic reasons, it is a problem very difficult to solve. Since the Obama administration came into office a new focus on the drug trade has made it possible for US forces to go after the drug lords and to interdict drug convoys. But the depth of the problem is much larger today than it was when the Taliban regime was toppled in the autumn of 2001. Ancient trade routes across the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan facilitate the trade, and despite some attempts to interdict and disrupt,<sup>87</sup> much more needs to be done. Today, the insurgency is netting enough money from the drug trade, and from other revenues, to be financially secure for a long time. External financial support comes mainly from foreign jihadist sources who have been supporting al Qaida and who still support various international jihadist groups in FATA and Afghanistan.

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<sup>84</sup> <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2009/12/21/un-fights-hunger-in-afghanistan.html>

<sup>85</sup> Op. cit, Rashid, *The Afghanistan Impasse*.

<sup>86</sup> Peters, Gretchen, *Seeds of Terror: How Heroin Is Bankrolling the Taliban and al Qaeda*, Thomas Dunne/St. Martins, NY, 2009.

<sup>87</sup> It is estimated by Pakistan's Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) that as much as a quarter of the un-refined refined and morphine-based opiates produced in Afghanistan passes through FATA, NWFP and Baluchistan. "Making Money in the Mayhem", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 32, no.2, February 2009, p. 95-108.

Even though the two separate strands of the Taliban – that in Pakistan and that in Afghanistan – differ and do not coordinate everything (they have for examples different leadership councils and to some extent different agendas, with the Pakistani Taliban much more inclined to subscribe to the ideology of global jihad), they share the focus on fighting Western forces in Afghanistan and do cooperate in collecting money to sustain that struggle.<sup>88</sup>

Apart from the drug trade, the insurgency is securing revenues from various sources, mainly in the FATA-area in Pakistan. The Pakistani Taliban (the TTP) were formed in 2007 in the Pakistani province of South Waziristan and it is there, and in the neighbouring province of North Waziristan, that they have, in essence, established a fiefdom and parallel administration.<sup>89</sup> They collect taxes, run the police and charge transportation. The so called *Rahdaari* (corridor) system, for example, forces truckers to pay the Taliban a hefty sum to pass unmolested. This is an extensive system which reaches all the way to Karachi, the main port of Pakistan. Karachi has a Taliban presence (and is known as the “crime capital” of Pakistan<sup>90</sup>). The local Taliban (or supporters) based there frequently provide the Taliban in FATA with information about transportations destined for NATO in Afghanistan, which they can then hijack or destroy.<sup>91</sup>

Moneywise, it is the Pakistani Taliban who are in charge of most of the revenue collection, using all the traditional means of getting money – donations, taxes and crime.<sup>92</sup> When the jihadists (including al Qaida) were forced out of Afghanistan following the war in 2001, they relocated to FATA and paid the local tribes to support them. This still constitute an important part of the money collected by the Taliban, but the taxes levied on the population and crime, are getting more and more important as certain sources in the GCC-countries (traditionally an important source for much of the jihadist support) have dried up due to the global financial recession.

Apart from money from the drug trade, kidnappings, robberies and extortion are important sources of income.<sup>93</sup> In short, it is a common mafia-like system of collecting money. It is clear from all of this that without solving the problems of FATA and its supporting crime-ridden Taliban-ruled areas, it will be impossible to deal with the problems in Afghanistan. Cross-border raids and drone attacks can only do so much. Without a comprehensive look at FATA, and the relation between FATA and Pakistan, no long-term solution will be found.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Op. cit, *Vanity Fair*.

<sup>91</sup> Op. cit, “Making Money in the Mayhem”, p. 95-108.

<sup>92</sup> Op. cit Peters and Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, vol. 32, no.2, February 2009, *Making Money in the Mayhem*, p. 95-108.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. Also: “Reconsidering American strategy in South Asia: destroying terrorist sanctuaries in Pakistan’s tribal areas”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 March 2009, p. 36-65.

### 3 Conclusion

*“America created this jihad. Then they left and we are facing the consequences”*

Mohammad Akbar Baluch, chief of the Federal Investigation Agency (F.I.A.) in Quetta. Vanity Fair, p.60)

It is no exaggeration to say that the International Community stands at a cross-road in Afghanistan. The choices are stark. At the heart of the issue lays the question of the future direction of Afghanistan. Eight years of war and civil strife has not led to the kind of development that was intended when the invasion began in 2001. Instead, the Taliban (and the remnants of the jihadi groups) have steadily gained strength, pushing the war into hitherto quite calm of areas of Afghanistan, like the north. At the same time, the border areas are as violent and difficult to guard as ever before. The so-called Pakistan Taliban has even staged several minor uprisings and there is a constant – although sometimes low-key – tension in the tribal areas between the army and the population. While the population might not necessarily support everything the Taliban does, it has been constantly squeezed between the warring parties and has suffered an increasing amount of civilian casualties due to air attacks.<sup>94</sup>

The fact that the problems of Afghanistan are so closely related to developments in Pakistan adds to the complication of the situation. And there is, as of yet, no clear strategy to square that particular circle. There are for example clear proofs that the Taliban leadership council (or shura) is active in, and around, the Pakistani city of Quetta, something that is constantly raised by US officials when they meet their Pakistani colleagues.

At present, some hard choices have to be made to continue the mission in Afghanistan. At top of the list is the issue of what the troop surge can achieve. Even though the increase in troop numbers was approved in accordance with the wishes of General McChrystal, the need for a Grand Strategy – whereby political, military and social parameters are incorporated into a whole – remains. The US, her allies and the UN must also come to an agreement on how to deal with the Afghan government, which after the elections in August is viewed as corrupt and unable and/or unwilling to reform. The tension between the US and the UN in how to handle the outcome of that contentious election came to light when the top US official with the UN mission to Afghanistan, Peter Galbraith, was removed from his post by his superior, the Norwegian Kai Eide.<sup>95</sup> This was due to “irreconcilable differences”<sup>96</sup> between the two. Peter Galbraith, who has long been an adviser and aid to President Obama’s special representative to the

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<sup>94</sup> These are mainly CIA-run strikes against Taliban-leaders and leaders of jihadi groups.

<sup>95</sup> “U.N. removes American from post as Afghanistan envoy”, *IHT*, October 1, 2009, p. 8.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

region, Richard Holbrooke, clashed several times with Eide over how to deal with the Afghan government, with Eide being in favor of a soft approach and Galbraith arguing for a more confrontational approach. The “soft” approach advocated by Eide might lead to short-term gains in that the present Afghan President will continue to work with the allies. But in the long-term, the longer one waits to confront the Afghan government with its corruption, lack of transparency and failure to provide the country with the necessary aid, the more difficult it will get.<sup>97</sup>

So, in essence, the same questions and issues that were on the table in October 2001 (when the war in Afghanistan entered its present phase) are still there and are still unanswered, and can be narrowed down to the question – what is the end goal? What interests do the US and her allies really have in Afghanistan? And how should these issues be addressed? Even with the new strategy presented by Washington (including an end date for the mission) these issues remain unanswered.

Without these and other issues and questions being sorted out, it is difficult to see how a successful policy towards Afghanistan can be formed, let alone carried out. Whatever the final outcome of that process, it will, unquestionably, be a very long fight. This was showed in an interview with the new head of the TTP, Hakimullah Mehsud. In a video released by the *Al-Sahab* media company (sometimes called the media-outlet for al Qaeda), Hakimullah explained that the two main goals of the TTP is to turn Pakistan into a country where Sharia rules and where the government has stopped all cooperation with the United States.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Op. cit, *TIME*, October 19.

<sup>98</sup> *Middle East Media Research Institute* (MEMRI), special dispatch No, 2602, October 16, 2009.

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