

ESCAPING THE “GRAVEYARD OF EMPIRES”

A Strategy to Exit Afghanistan



MALOU INNOCENT AND TED GALEN CARPENTER

ESCAPING THE “GRAVEYARD OF EMPIRES”

A Strategy to Exit Afghanistan

MALOU INNOCENT AND TED GALEN CARPENTER

CATO
INSTITUTE

Copyright © 2009 by the Cato Institute.
All rights reserved.

Cover design by Jon Meyers.

Printed in the United States of America.

CATO INSTITUTE
1000 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001
www.cato.org

Executive Summary

Given the nature of the conflict in Afghanistan, a definitive, conventional “victory” is not a realistic option. Denying a sanctuary to terrorists who seek to attack the United States does not require Washington to pacify the entire country, eradicate its opium fields, or sustain a long-term military presence in Central Asia. From the sky, U.S. unmanned aerial vehicles can monitor villages, training camps, and insurgent compounds. On the ground, the United States can retain a small number of covert operatives for intelligence gathering and discrete operations against specific targets, as well as an additional small group of advisers to train Afghan police and military forces. The United States should withdraw most of its forces from Afghanistan within the next 12 to 18 months and treat al Qaeda’s presence in the region as a chronic, but manageable, problem.

Washington needs to narrow its objectives to three critical tasks:

Security. Support, rather than supplant, indigenous security efforts by training and assisting the Afghan national army and police and, where appropriate, paying off or otherwise co-opting regional militias. Training should be tied to clear metrics. If those benchmarks are not achieved, Washington must cut its losses and cease further assistance. U.S. forces should not become Afghanistan’s perpetual crutch.

Intelligence and Regional Relations. Sustain intelligence operations in the region through aerial surveillance, covert operations, and ongoing intelligence-sharing with the Afghan and Pakistani governments. Seek cordial relations with all of Af-

ghanistan’s neighbors, particularly Russia and Iran, as each has the means to significantly undermine or facilitate progress in the country.

Drugs. Dial back an opium eradication policy to one that solely targets drug cartels affiliated with insurgents rather than one that targets all traffickers, including poor local farmers. Harassing the latter alienates a significant portion of the rural population.

Central Asia holds little intrinsic strategic value to the United States, and America’s security will not be endangered even if an oppressive regime takes over a contiguous fraction of Afghan territory. America’s objective has been to neutralize the parties responsible for the atrocities committed on 9/11. The United States should not go beyond that objective by combating a regional insurgency or drifting into an open-ended occupation and nation-building mission.

Most important, Afghanistan serves as the crossroads of Central Asia. From its invasion by Genghis Khan and his two-million strong Mongol hordes to the superpower proxy war between the United States and the Soviet Union, Afghanistan’s trade routes and land-locked position in the middle of the region have for centuries rendered it vulnerable to invasion by external powers. Although Afghanistan has endured successive waves of Persian, Greek, Arab, Turk, Mongol, British, and Soviet invaders, no occupying power has ever successfully conquered it. There’s a reason why it has been described as the “graveyard of empires,” and unless America scales down its objectives, it risks meeting a similar fate.

General McChrystal has also called for a “cultural shift” in America’s approach to the mission.

Introduction: Change Comes to Washington—and Afghanistan

President Barack Obama coupled his wise commitment to end the war in Iraq with an ill-advised campaign pledge to increase America’s commitment in Afghanistan. True to his word, within his first 100 days in office, the president approved a nearly 50 percent increase in U.S. combat deployments to Afghanistan. As of August 2009, 68,000 U.S. troops and 30,000 NATO troops are deployed there.¹ The new administration also replaced the commander of the International Security Assistance Force, General David McKiernan, who apparently was deemed “too conventional” in his military strategy, with General Stanley McChrystal, who commanded special operations forces in Iraq and is expected to try to win over the local population—the “center of gravity”—in Afghanistan.²

Much of Afghanistan’s violence is concentrated in the southern and eastern provinces, particularly Kandahar, the heart of “Taliban country.”³ New army units will deploy to Wardak, Logar, Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan, and Laghman provinces in Regional Command East, and Kandahar and Zabul provinces in Regional Command South. Also, the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade will assist British forces currently fighting in Helmand province.

Ground operations under the Obama administration clearly draw from the “clear-hold-build” model suggested in the *Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (FM 3-24). That three-phased strategy advises counterinsurgents and host nation forces to kill, destroy, or otherwise force the surrender or withdrawal of insurgents from a given area (clear), restore security in the contested area (hold), and establish infrastructure and basic services for the local population (build).

That model requires soldiers to move away from big, forward-operating bases and immerse themselves into the local population. The Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, where soldiers prepare for deployment, uses native-born Afghans to role-play as village

elders and interpreters, simulating day-to-day situations.⁴ General McChrystal has also called for a “cultural shift” in America’s approach to the mission. Officers and soldiers will be assigned to five-year deployment cycles, and be rotated in and out in nine-month stints to better learn Afghanistan’s rough human and geographic terrain.⁵

Traditional counterinsurgency missions, such as protecting the population, training indigenous forces, and conducting psychological operations, will be the centerpiece of this approach.⁶ But the choice of McChrystal may also signal a shift to the use of commando units outside of the normal military chain of command to target key individuals and groups. These direct action activities, dubbed “collaborative warfare,” combine intelligence intercepts with precision strikes to eliminate key insurgent leaders. In Iraq, McChrystal spearheaded a series of top-secret special operations that targeted key individuals in al Qaeda and the Sunni insurgency, such as Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al Qaeda in Iraq. In Afghanistan, such limited operations could help the United States more effectively target combatants and minimize civilian casualties. Targeting top leaders, however, may also undermine the Afghan government’s engagement initiatives with former insurgents. And according to two U.S. officials who spoke to the *Washington Post*, McChrystal has the authority to go after high-value targets inside Pakistan without having to seek permission first—an approach that could complicate the already tense situation in that country.⁷

In March 2009 the Obama administration released a wide-ranging strategic review of U.S. policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁸ Despite that review, the changes are more a shift in tactics, as the war effort still lacks a clearly defined strategy. The principal change is a troop “surge,” but that will not be sufficient to achieve Washington’s ambitious goals in Afghanistan.

The infusion of additional troops and the change of top-level commanders might dampen violence in the near term, but the in-

tractable insurgency in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, as well as pervasive Afghan government corruption, will plague the country in the long term. Notwithstanding the results of Afghanistan's recent presidential elections, U.S. policy in the region was already committed to transforming what is a deeply divided, poverty stricken, tribal-based society into a self-sufficient, non-corrupt, stable democracy. Such a project would require a multi-decade commitment—and even then there would be no assurance of success. In that respect, no tangible gains will outweigh the costs of maintaining such a military presence

in this volatile region. The United States should narrow its objectives and start bringing the military mission to a close.

Why America Needs an Exit Strategy

The war in Afghanistan has no simple remedies. Eight years after the fall of the Taliban regime, the country still struggles to survive under the most brutal circumstances: corrupt and ineffective state institutions, thousands of miles of unguarded borders,

Transforming a deeply divided, tribal-based society into a self-sufficient, stable democracy would require a multi-decade commitment.

Figure 1
Afghanistan's Provinces



Source: Gilles Dorronsoro, "The Taliban's Winning Strategy in Afghanistan," *Carnegie Report*, June 2009, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/taliban_winning_strategy.pdf, p. 2.

The Obama administration appears to be drifting toward open-ended nation building.

pervasive illiteracy among a largely rural and decentralized population, a weak president, and a dysfunctional international alliance. As if that weren't enough, some of Afghanistan's neighbors have incentives to foment instability there.

Given Afghanistan's numerous challenges, policymakers must consider the unpleasant likelihood that the insurgency might outlast the presence of international troops. But, as explained below, the United States can continue to disrupt terrorist havens without perpetuating a large-scale military presence on the ground.

The Obama administration's March 2009 strategic review declared, "[T]he core goal of the U.S. must be to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and its safe havens in Pakistan, and to prevent their return to Pakistan or Afghanistan." That statement suggests that the president does not wish to maintain a permanent military presence. But, as in previous administrations, conflicting public statements cloud a clear assessment of policy. In an interview with *60 Minutes*, President Obama insisted, "There's got to be an exit strategy. . . . There's got to be a sense that this is not perpetual drift."⁹ Yet less than a week later, the president appeared to drift toward open-ended nation building. He warned, "A return to Taliban rule would condemn their country to brutal governance, international isolation, a paralyzed economy, and the denial of basic human rights."¹⁰

Although Obama understandably empathizes with the suffering of others, a president's decision to sacrifice thousands of lives and billions of dollars warrants criteria more stringent than countering a laundry list of negative traits embodied by countless countries around the world. North Korea, Haiti, Burma, Zimbabwe, and dozens of other states suffer from "brutal governance, international isolation, a paralyzed economy, and the denial of basic human rights."

Afghanistan is hardly unique, but policymakers feel compelled to have a large-scale, long-term U.S. footprint remain. Reflexively, they posit the continuing threat from al Qaeda

as a justification for a presence. But that rationale does not withstand close scrutiny.

Dangerous Myths

Myth #1: A U.S. Military Presence Is Needed to Defeat a Lethal al Qaeda and Taliban Threat

Al Qaeda does have a presence in the region and some people fear that if the United States were to withdraw, the Taliban might retake control of Kabul and once again provide shelter to al Qaeda. Bruce Riedel of the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution, who served as Obama's top Afghanistan adviser during the 2008 presidential campaign, argues that NATO countries must "not let the global jihad take over [Afghanistan and Pakistan] and further expand their sanctuaries."¹¹ Frederick Kagan of the American Enterprise Institute argues that "Afghanistan is not now a sanctuary for al-Qaeda, but it would likely become one again if we abandoned it. . . . Allowing Afghanistan to fail would mean allowing these determined enemies of the United States to regain the freedom they had before 9/11."¹²

Al Qaeda poses a manageable security problem, not an existential threat to America. Washington's response, with an open-ended mission, is both unnecessary and unsustainable. Technological advances over the past decade allow us to keep an eye on places without having tens of thousands of boots on the ground.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) surveil roads for improvised explosive devices, transmitting 16,000 hours of video each month.¹³ UAVs are smaller, lighter, and cheaper than manned aircraft, because they don't need equipment to support a crew, and operations can run without combat search-and-rescue in place. UAV missions are far less intrusive than a large-scale military presence, and they can help protect legitimate American security interests. UAV technology would also help to ensure we do not see a repeat of the 1990s, when the United States documented links between the Taliban and al

Qaeda, but hovered between indifference and bureaucratic paralysis when shaping policy in the region. Today, we can target terrorists where they do emerge via airstrikes and covert raids. Thus, denying a sanctuary to terrorists who seek to attack the United States does not require complete pacification of Afghanistan, much less a long-term, large-scale military presence in the region.

Moreover, the worst-case scenario—the resurrection of the Taliban’s fundamentalist regime—does not threaten America’s sovereignty or physical security. Many policymakers who call for an indefinite military presence in Afghanistan conflate bin Laden’s network—a transnational jihadist organization—with the Taliban—an indigenous Pashtun-dominated movement. But the Taliban and other parochial fighters pose little threat to the sovereignty or physical security of the United States. The fear that the Taliban will take over a contiguous fraction of Afghan territory is not compelling enough of a rationale to maintain an indefinite, large-scale military presence in the region, especially since the insurgency is largely confined to predominately Pashtun southern and eastern provinces and is unlikely to take over the country as a whole, as we saw in the 1990s.

Even if the Taliban were to reassert themselves amid a scaled down U.S. presence, it is not clear that the Taliban would again host al Qaeda. In *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, Lawrence Wright, staff writer for *New Yorker* magazine, found that before 9/11 the Taliban was divided over whether to shelter Osama bin Laden.¹⁴ The terrorist financier wanted to attack Saudi Arabia’s royal family, which, according to Wright, would have defied a pledge Taliban leader Mullah Omar made to Prince Turki al-Faisal, chief of Saudi intelligence (1977–2001), to keep bin Laden under control. The Taliban’s reluctance to host al Qaeda’s leader means it is not a foregone conclusion that the same group would provide shelter to the same organization whose protection led to their overthrow.

America’s claim that the Taliban is its enemy, and its preoccupation with the group’s

admittedly reprehensible practices, seems less than coherent. After all, although some U.S. officials issued toothless and perfunctory condemnations of the Taliban when it controlled most of Afghanistan from September 1996 through October 2001, during that time the United States never once made a substantive policy shift toward or against the Taliban despite knowing that it imposed a misogynistic, oppressive, and militant Islamic regime onto Afghans. For Washington to now pursue an uncompromising hostility toward the Taliban’s eye-for-an-eye brand of justice can be interpreted as an opportunistic attempt to cloak U.S. strategic ambitions in moralistic values.

In June, Dutch army general Mart de Kruif estimated that there were between 10,000 and 18,000 Taliban fighters in southern Afghanistan.¹⁵ The number of al Qaeda operatives appears to be much smaller. According to a Pakistani intelligence assessment provided to the *New York Times* last February, al Qaeda has adapted to the deaths of its leaders by shifting “to conduct decentralized operations under small but well-organized regional groups.”¹⁶ That dynamic underscores the importance that President Obama resist the urge to increase America’s military presence in Afghanistan beyond what he has already unwisely committed. As long as militants can exploit collateral damage (civilian casualties) for their propaganda and continue to promulgate the perception that they are fighting against the injustice of a foreign occupation, they will draw more recruits to their cause and erode the legitimacy of the Afghan government. Most important, troop increases are likely to push disparate Islamist groups to unite.

Finally, it is important to recognize that people in Washington tend to exaggerate the specter of the al Qaeda threat. “We must see jihadists for the small, lethal, disjointed and miserable opponents that they are,” says Glenn Carle, a 23-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency who served as deputy national intelligence officer for transnational threats. “Al Qaeda,” Carle argued in the op-ed pages of the *Washington Post*, “has only a hand-

Denying a sanctuary to terrorists does not require complete pacification of Afghanistan, much less a long-term, large-scale military presence in the region.

The claim that Afghanistan would be destabilized if the United States were to decrease its presence is misleading; Afghanistan will be chronically unstable regardless.

ful of individuals capable of planning, organizing, and leading a terrorist operation . . . Its capabilities are far inferior to its desires.”¹⁷

Al Qaeda is not an existential threat to the United States. It is increasingly unlikely that the group could mount another attack on the scale of 9/11, much less anything larger. All of al Qaeda’s attacks since 9/11 have been more modest, and they have grown more infrequent. In fact, Washington’s continued fixation on the group presents a bigger threat to genuine American interests than the group itself can pose. Alarmism increases the group’s credibility while diverting finite economic and military resources away from increased domestic security. And, as John Mueller, Woody Hayes Chair of National Security Studies at Ohio State University argues, a national predisposition to overreact to terrorism can make the United States a more appealing terrorist target.¹⁸ Though the United States should continue to monitor al Qaeda carefully and carry out operations against it as opportunities arise, it does not merit the strategic obsession that it currently receives.

In short, as the war in Afghanistan rages on, President Obama should be skeptical of suggestions that the defeat of al Qaeda depends on more and more U.S. troops. First, al Qaeda terrorist havens can be disrupted through covert operations and supported by unmanned aerial vehicles. Second, an oppressive regime in Afghanistan does not necessarily threaten the United States. Third, it is not clear that the Taliban, if they were to regain control of much of the territory, would again harbor al Qaeda. And fourth, troop increases are likely to incite fierce resistance to foreign forces rather than enhance the prospects of success in a country as large, rural, and impoverished as Afghanistan.

Myth #2: America’s Presence Prevents the Region’s Implosion

Some analysts, including Carnegie Endowment senior associate Robert Kagan, insist that were the United States to evacuate Afghanistan, the political and military vacuum left by our departure would lead to serious instability throughout the region.¹⁹ But instability, in the

sense of a perpetually anarchic state of nature dominated by tribal warlords and pervasive bloodshed, has characterized the region for decades—even centuries. Thus, the claim that Afghanistan would be destabilized if the United States were to decrease its presence is misleading, since Afghanistan will be chronically unstable regardless. Most Americans are simply oblivious to the region’s history.

Numerous tribes along the border of northwest Pakistan and southern and eastern Afghanistan have a long history of war-making and rebellion, now erroneously branded as “Talibanism.”²⁰ King’s College London professor Christian Tripodi, an expert on British colonial-era tribal policy, explains what British administrators confronted when dealing with Pashtun tribes along what is today the frontier between Afghanistan and Pakistan:

What the British refused to grasp was that tribal raiding and violence was not necessarily a product of poverty or lack of opportunity. The tribes viewed raiding as honourable and possibly quite fun, an activity that was centuries old, rooted in their culture and one of those things that defined a man in a society that placed a premium upon independence and aggression.²¹

Contrary to the claims that we should use the U.S. military to stabilize the region and reduce the threat of terrorism, a 2008 study by the RAND Corporation found that U.S. policies emphasizing the use of force tend to create new terrorists. In “How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qai’da,” Seth Jones and Martin Libicki argue that the U.S. military “should generally resist being drawn into combat operations in Muslim societies, since [a U.S. military] presence is likely to increase terrorist recruitment.”²²

Some policymakers claim the war is worth waging because terrorists flourish in failed states. But that argument cannot account for terrorists who thrive in centralized states that have the sovereignty to reject external interference.²³ That is one reason why mili-

tants find sanctuary in neighboring, nuclear-armed Pakistan.

In this respect, and perhaps most important, is the belief that our presence in the region helps Pakistan, when in fact the seemingly open-ended U.S. presence in Afghanistan risks creating worse problems for Pakistan. Amassing troops in Afghanistan feeds the perception of a foreign occupation, spawning more terrorist recruits for Pakistani militias and thus placing undue stress on an already weakened nation.

Christian Science Monitor correspondent Anand Gopal finds, “In late 2007, as many as 27 groups merged to form an umbrella Taliban movement, the Tehreek-e-Taliban, under guerilla leader Baitullah Mehsud.” He continues, “Three of the most powerful, once-feuding commanders—Mr. Mehsud and Maulavi Nazeer of South Waziristan and Hafiz Gul Behadur of North Waziristan—formed an alliance in response to US airstrikes.”²⁴

America’s presence has already caused major problems for the government in Islamabad, which is deeply unpopular for many reasons, including its alignment with U.S. policies.²⁵ There are also indications that it has raised tensions in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries. For Islamic militants throughout the region, the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan—like the occupation of Iraq—is an increasingly potent recruiting tool. Only by prolonging our military presence do we allow the Taliban, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hizb-e Islami, the Haqqani network, and even Pakistani Taliban militants to reframe the conflict and their position within it as a legitimate defense against a foreign occupation. In this respect, policymakers should recognize that not everyone willing to resist U.S. intervention is necessarily an enemy of the United States. Most importantly, we must understand that not every Islamic fundamentalist is a radical Islamist, let alone one who is hell-bent on launching a terrorist attack against the American homeland.

Myth #3: Withdrawal Would Erode America’s Global Status

Former national security adviser Henry

Kissinger, Council on Foreign Relations scholar Stephen Biddle, and many others, concede that the war in Central Asia will be long, expensive, and risky, yet they claim it is ultimately worth waging because a withdrawal would boost jihadism globally and make America look weak.²⁶ But what we’ve invested in the Afghanistan mission could all fall apart whether we withdraw tomorrow or 20 years from now. In fact, if leaving would make America look weak, trying to stay indefinitely while accomplishing little would appear even worse. If the issue is preventing U.S. soldiers from having died in vain, pursuing a losing strategy would not vindicate their sacrifice. And trying to pacify all of Afghanistan, much less hoping to do so on a permanent basis, is a losing strategy.

Regardless, some people invoke memories of America’s ignominious withdrawals from Vietnam, Somalia, and Lebanon to muster support for an open-ended commitment. President Bush in 2007 claimed that withdrawing from Vietnam emboldened today’s terrorists by compromising U.S. credibility. “Here at home,” he said, “some can argue our withdrawal from Vietnam carried no price to American credibility, but the terrorists see things differently.”²⁷ Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute agrees with that reasoning, writing that “the 1983 withdrawal from Lebanon and the retreat from Somalia a decade later emboldened Islamists who saw the United States as a paper tiger.”²⁸

When opinion leaders in Washington talk about “lessons learned” from Vietnam, Somalia, Lebanon, and other conflicts, they typically draw the wrong lesson: not that America should avoid intervening in someone else’s domestic dispute, but that America should never give up after having intervened, no matter what the cost.²⁹ But the longer we stay and the more money we spend, the more we’ll feel compelled to remain in the country to validate the investment. A similar self-imposed predicament plagued U.S. officials during the war in Vietnam:

After 1968 it became increasingly clear that the survival of the [government of

If leaving would make America look weak, trying to stay indefinitely while accomplishing little would appear even worse.

For decades, the fear of America losing the world's respect after withdrawing from a conflict has been instrumental in selling the American public bad foreign policy.

South Vietnam] was not worth the cost of securing it, but by then the United States had another rationale for staying—prestige and precedent setting. The United States said the [South Vietnamese government] would stand, and even those in the administration now long convinced of the hollowness of the domino argument could agree that a U.S. failure in South Vietnam might endanger vital US national interests elsewhere or in the future.³⁰

For decades, the fear of America losing the world's respect after withdrawing from a conflict has been instrumental in selling the American public bad foreign policy.

Perhaps most troubling about the reflexively “stay the course” mentality of some Americans is the widespread insensitivity about the thousands of people—civilian and military, domestic and foreign—killed, maimed, and traumatized in war. But when the stakes seem unrelated to vital national interests, the American public rightly resents their country's interference in third party problems, and is extremely skeptical of nation building. History shows that, sooner or later, disenchantment will manifest in public and congressional opposition. After nearly a decade in Afghanistan, even the memory of 9/11 might not be sufficient to outweigh the sacrifice in blood and treasure.

Perhaps the most important argument against the “withdrawal is weak-kneed” meme is that America's military roams the planet, controls the skies and space, faces no peer competitor, and wields one of the planet's largest nuclear arsenals. America is responsible for almost half of the world's military spending and can project its power around the globe. Thus, the contention that America would appear “weak” after withdrawing from Afghanistan is ludicrous.

Unfortunately, bureaucratic inertia and a misplaced conception of Washington's moral obligations (an argument that more often than not legitimizes America's military occupation of a foreign people) threaten to trap the United States in Afghanistan for decades.

Overall, remaining in Afghanistan is more likely to tarnish America's reputation and undermine U.S. security than would withdrawal.

Myth #4: America Can Build a Modern, Stable Afghanistan

After nearly eight years, the pledge to rebuild Afghanistan made at the Bonn Conference is no closer to being fulfilled. Nor is the 2001 pledge “to withdraw all military units from Kabul and other urban centers or other areas in which the UN- mandated force is deployed.”³¹ Indeed, Marin Strmecki, a policy coordinator and special adviser on Afghanistan from 2003 to 2005 for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, has urged the Obama administration to remain in the region until Afghans “establish an effective and representative government.”³² Scholars at the Center for American Progress insist America must “build a national representative government that is able to govern, defend, and sustain itself.”³³

Scholars and officials who believe that a representative government in Afghanistan ought to be a central goal of U.S. policy have yet to reconcile the imbalance between what Afghanistan is—a complex tapestry of traditional tribal structures—and what we want it to be—a stable, modern nation-state governed centrally from Kabul. Accepting the argument that America must build a nationally representative government means that defeating the spreading Islamist insurgency will depend on the coalition's commitment to increase the Afghan government's ability to improve security, deliver basic services, and expand development for economic opportunity. Before committing further to such an ambitious project, U.S. policymakers need to grasp the depths of the problems at hand.

Whereas the U.S. occupation has brought major improvements in Afghan education and health care, creating a functioning economy and building infrastructure will take years—or decades. About 70 percent of Afghans live on less than two dollars per day. Life expectancy runs between 42.5 and 44 years. Every 28 minutes, a woman dies during childbirth, and one

in four children will die before their fifth birthday. Only 51 percent of Afghan men over the age of 15, and a mere 21 percent of women in the same age group, can read and write.³⁴

In addition to overcoming the structural obstacles posed by Afghanistan's poor economic development, the United States has tried to assist the growth of the rule of law.³⁵ Inevitably, however, such attempts face stiff resistance. One glaring example is women's rights. Some Afghan experts, such as lawyer and entrepreneur Mariam Nawabi, recognize that fully implementing women's rights will take years of cultural change and education.³⁶ In 2003 Nawabi provided recommendations to the country's Constitutional Review Commission, which the Gender and Law Working Group used in advocating the inclusion of a clause in the Afghan constitution to provide equality for men and women.

Such changes will be tough, considering the strictness of some social codes. For example, in March 2009, the manager of an Afghan television station was arrested for broadcasting a woman's bare arms. Many television stations either cut or blur images of women that show more than their faces or necks, so as not to violate government law prohibiting media content not "within the framework of Islam."³⁷

In April 2009, Afghanistan's parliament passed a bill that stripped Shia women of the right to leave their homes without permission and sanctioned rape within marriage. The law rekindled memories of the country's Sunni fundamentalist government under the Taliban, in which girls were not allowed to attend school, women were not allowed to leave their homes unless escorted by a male relative, and women who did leave their homes were required to wear a burqa, which covers a woman from head to toe.³⁸ President Hamid Karzai later diluted the law after it attracted domestic and international condemnation, but its passage indicates just how out of touch are America's goals for rule of law and social liberalization in Afghanistan.

Sippi Azarbaijani-Maghaddam, who has worked in Afghanistan for 13 years, finds

that despite laws prohibiting discrimination against women, many practices are applied on the basis of rigid, one-sided, and patriarchal notions of honor and female integrity. She argues the Afghan government can facilitate the advance of women held back by oppression, but it must "perform a balancing act to avoid a backlash from conservative elements at home."³⁹

U.S. and NATO officials can assist social and cultural advancements when possible, but initiatives should be undertaken with Afghans in the lead, as some will fiercely resist social changes if they perceive Westerners as forcibly liberalizing their culture.

The broader goal of long-term development and governance assistance is a Sisyphean task. Indeed, rather than rebuilding, the United States and NATO would be building much of the country from scratch, such as erecting infrastructure and tailoring a judicial system to make it both "modern" and compatible with local customs. Moreover, the U.S.-led coalition would be undertaking such a monumental enterprise in a country awash with weapons, notoriously suspicious of outsiders, and largely absent of central authority. That is an impossible mission. It's critical that U.S. policymakers narrow their objectives to disrupting those forces responsible for the 9/11 attacks. The United States should not drift further into a utopian nation-building operation. Indeed, America has already sunk too far into that morass.

Myth #5: Understanding Afghanistan's Tribes Will Lead to Success

During the Bush administration, the United States failed to identify the Afghan tribes, leaders, and individuals who could have assisted in bringing stability to the country.⁴⁰ Consequently, coalition forces were unable to recruit local allies in their fight against the Taliban in the south, and the Haqqani network and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin groups in the east. That lack of attention to tribal policies has drawn justifiable criticism. Thomas Johnson, research professor at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School,

The goal of long-term development and governance assistance is a Sisyphean task. Indeed, rather than rebuilding, the United States would be building much of the country from scratch.

**Many tribes living
in rural, isolated,
and sparsely
populated
provinces have
little interest
cooperating with
“foreigners.”**

wrote in 2008, “We must understand the human terrain. We have to turn every soldier into an ethnic-linguistic warrior. . . . Knowing the culture, the cultural terrain and at least some language is critically important to success.” Johnson continued, “We have to understand and exploit the fissures between the different insurgency groups.”⁴¹

The United States is only now beginning to devote more resources to learning the allegiances of various tribes. This is important, as tribal identity and other linkages of kinship (*qawm*) influence Afghan politics. But merely increasing our knowledge of tribal politics, while useful, will not guarantee success. Afghans have repelled foreign invaders for centuries. Tinkering with foreign people through such social engineering schemes and presuming we can simply learn what groups can be “peeled off” from militants may prove unsuccessful, regardless of how well-intentioned. Not only do good intentions not ensure success, but even the most effective training and planning does not necessarily mean we will reach the ends we seek or yield the outcomes we want.

In a country like Afghanistan, where religious, ethnic, and political loyalties are constantly shifting, a pledge of support to the Afghan government from a leader or clear faction might be transitory. A village can be “pro-NATO” one day and “pro-Taliban” the next.⁴² Stability operations expert Nick Dowling, who keeps a web-log of his adventures in Afghanistan at *Small Wars Journal*, illustrates the struggle coalition soldiers have in engaging locals in Kunar, one of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces:

In small wars, we talk of human terrain as well as geographic terrain. In both senses, Kunar has some of the roughest, most inaccessible terrain in the world. Deeply isolated, xenophobic, independent tribes occupy steep northern valleys of Gaziabad, Pech, and Korengal with no roads in or out. Tribal conflict and smuggling interests incite violence and well-established collaboration with

the Taliban. Attacks on [U.S.] forces are a daily threat, including major coordinated operations.”⁴³

Many tribes living in rural, isolated, and sparsely populated provinces have little interest cooperating with “foreigners,” a relative term considering the limited contact many have with their country’s own central government.

Afghanistan’s political and tribal rivalries are incredibly complex and growing more so. The country’s estimated 33 million people hail from more than 20 diverse ethnic groups, including Uzbek, Tajik, Baluch/Baloch, Turkman, Pashai, Nuristani, and others. Many of these groups have different tribal policies. They also adhere to different religious traditions. Most Afghans are Sunni, but some, like the Hazara, are Shia. Despite its diverse makeup, Afghanistan is most commonly associated with its largest ethnic group, the Pashtuns. Even this group is fragmented; there are more than 50 tribes within the Pashtun ethnic group, including Ghilzai, Durrani, Wazirs, Afridis, and dozens more living in southern and eastern Afghanistan and along the border in northwest Pakistan.⁴⁴ Each Pashtun tribe divides into sub-tribes or clans (*khels*); there is estimated to be 30 clans in the Mehsud tribe alone.⁴⁵ Each clan then divides into sections that split into extended families.

To win Afghan hearts and minds, the United States and the Afghan government not only have to compete with the Taliban’s shadow government, but also contend with the amalgamation of mullahs and warlords, such as Karim Khalili, Abdul Rashid Dostum, Haji Abdul Quadir, and others who have usurped the power of indigenous tribal chiefs. The issue of tribal and political rivalries has plagued the region for centuries. As David B. Edwards, professor of Social Sciences at Williams College, writes in *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier*, “Afghanistan’s central problem [is] Afghanistan itself, specifically certain profound moral contradictions that have inhibited this country from forging a coherent civil society.” Edwards continues, “These contradic-

tions are deeply rooted in Afghan culture, but they have come to the fore in the last one hundred years, since the advent of the nation-state, the laying down of permanent borders, and the attempt to establish an extensive state bureaucracy and to invest that bureaucracy with novel forms of authority and control.”⁴⁶

For the United States and its allies to navigate such complex tribal rivalries is an extremely daunting task. For example, Durrani Pashtuns have traditionally served as Afghanistan’s political elite. President Karzai himself emerged from the Popalzai clan of the Durrani confederation. Many Ghilzai Pashtuns in the country’s east, unlike their Durrani counterparts, tend to be rural, less well educated, and were the main foot soldiers of the Taliban. The Karzai government alienates some historically marginalized Durrani clans as well as some Ghilzai clans in the east, which today have only token representation in the Afghan government.⁴⁷ The relationship between tribes and Afghanistan’s central government will continue to be tenuous.

Then there is the issue of what to do about the Taliban. Tribal identity and government favoritism aside, U.S. officials confirm that the White House and senior-level military officials have actively considered taking part in talks with the Taliban, the rulers of most of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001.⁴⁸

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Senior Associate Ashley Tellis argues that talks with the Taliban might work, but concludes that the timing isn’t right. He argues that the United States and NATO must first score decisive victories on the battlefield, because reconciliation can only come about “through a coalition political-military victory that diminishes the rewards for continued resistance.”⁴⁹

Tellis has a compelling point, but as an aside, the debate over whether the United States and NATO should engage the Taliban rests on a false premise: external actors often undermine the legitimacy of the host government when they insist on having a say about which tribes, groups, leaders, and individuals the host government engages. U.S. policymakers should not decide for the Afghan government whom to incorporate into a for-

mal power-sharing deal or otherwise try to micromanage the country’s internal political system, as Washington did on the national level during Afghanistan’s 2004 presidential election. At the time, U.S. officials pressured a number of prominent candidates to drop out of the race to ensure Karzai’s victory.⁵⁰

In any case, the Afghan government has been trying to engage militants since February 2004. The Program Takhim-e-Solhl, an initiative aimed at reconciling foot soldiers of the Taliban with the Afghan government, has thus far convinced 2,000 rank-and-file insurgents to pledge support to the Afghan state, out of an estimated pool of between 10,000 and 18,000 Taliban fighters.⁵¹

Although the approach to gradually pry the loyalties of indigenous people away from extremists is intended to weaken the Taliban’s ability to exploit tribal rivalries, a better understanding of tribes and warlords does not mean that Washington will achieve its broader goals.

Myth #6: Anti-Drug Efforts Are Essential to the Afghan Mission

Officials in both the Bush and Obama administrations have argued that weakening the drug trade is essential to the success of the broader mission to defeat al Qaeda and the Taliban. Indeed, they argue that the continued vigor of the drug trade poses a lethal threat to Afghanistan’s entire economic and political structure.

U.S. officials continue to stress that point. The U.S. State Department’s most recent *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* contends that “Afghanistan’s narcotics industry continues to threaten efforts to establish security, governance, and a licit economy throughout the country.”⁵² Nongovernmental experts and pundits make similar arguments. In September 2006, Thomas Donnelly, at the time a scholar at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, asserted that the drug trade is “a threat to the writ of the central government. I think that’s really the key.”⁵³

The Extent of Drug-Related Corruption

In addition to the general problem of cor-

U.S. policymakers should not decide for the Afghan government whom to incorporate into a formal power-sharing deal.

A Senate Foreign Relations Committee report concluded, “There is no evidence that any significant amount of the drug proceeds go to al Qaeda.”

ruption caused by drug money, U.S. officials are deeply concerned about the opium trade providing a lucrative source of revenue for the Taliban, al Qaeda, and other enemies of the U.S.-backed government. The U.S. State Department concludes: “Taliban and other anti-government forces have extorted \$50 million to \$70 million in protection payments from opium farmers and an additional \$200 to \$400 million of income in forced levies on the more lucrative drug processing and trafficking in 2008.”⁵⁴ Heritage Foundation analysts Lisa Curtis and James Phillips in their October 2007 report, “Revitalizing U.S. Efforts in Afghanistan,” argue that “Opium . . . fuels the Taliban’s drive for power, as well as the activities of other insurgent groups and warlords opposed to the government.” Therefore, they conclude, U.S. forces “must do more to disrupt the narcotics trade.”⁵⁵

There is little doubt that anti-government forces profit from the drug trade, although an August 2009 Senate Foreign Relations Committee report concluded that the funds flowing to the Taliban were probably much lower—only \$70 million to \$125 million—than the \$300 to \$400 million estimated by the State Department and the United Nations. Moreover, the report states: “Surprisingly, there is no evidence that any significant amount of the drug proceeds go to al Qaeda.”⁵⁶ In any case, the United States faces a serious dilemma if it conducts a vigorous drug eradication campaign in Afghanistan in an effort to dry up the funds flowing to the Taliban and other anti-government elements. Those are clearly not the only factions involved in drug trafficking. Karzai’s political allies are also heavily engaged in such activities.⁵⁷ There are allegations that the president’s brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, is linked to drug-trafficking operations.⁵⁸ The State Department notes tersely: “Many Afghan government officials are believed to profit from the drug trade. Narcotics-related corruption is particularly pervasive at the provincial and district levels of government.”⁵⁹

In his investigative series on drug trafficking in Afghanistan, McClatchy correspondent Tom Lasseter notes how government officials

enjoy a lavish lifestyle. “Locals call them ‘poppy palaces,’ the three- or four-story marble homes with fake Roman columns perched behind razor wire and guard shack in Afghanistan’s capital. Most are owned by Afghan officials or people connected to them, men who make a few hundred dollars a month as government employees, but are driven around in small convoys of armored SUVs that cost tens of thousands of dollars.”⁶⁰

Equal opportunity corruption is certainly evident in Kandahar province. At harvest time, Taliban fighters pull up on their motorbikes to collect a 10 percent tax on the opium crop from each farmer. At roughly the same time in the season, Afghan police arrive in U.S.-supplied pickup trucks to demand a percentage of the income from the crop in exchange for assurances that they will skip the farms during annual eradication drives.⁶¹

Many politically well-connected warlords control the drug trade in their respective regions. They use the revenues from that trade to pay the militias that keep them in power in their fiefdoms and give them national political clout. Some of these individuals backed the Taliban when that faction was in power, switching sides only when the United States launched its military offensive in Afghanistan in October 2001. There is a serious risk that an anti-drug crusade might cause them to change their allegiance yet again. The resistance of regional leaders to anti-drug campaigns is vehement and pervasive. A January 2009 UN report notes: “Although the Government and international stakeholders remain committed to eradication, no Governor-led eradication had been initiated in any part of the country.”⁶²

In addition to the cooperative warlords, the U.S.-led coalition relies on poppy growers as spies for information on movements of Taliban and al Qaeda units. A disruption of the opium crop could alienate those crucial sources of information. Brookings Institution scholar Vanda Felbab-Brown notes the “substantially decreased willingness of the population to provide intelligence on the Taliban to NATO and the Afghan National Army” be-

cause of eradication efforts. Although the threat of Taliban reprisals is a factor in the growing unwillingness to give information, “the alienation of the population through counter-narcotics strategies further hampers intelligence-gathering.”⁶³

The Importance of the Drug Trade to Afghanistan’s Economy

Afghanistan is the world’s largest source—by far—for opium, the raw ingredient for heroin. It now provides more than 90 percent of the global opium supply. The United Nations concludes the U.S.-led coalition’s opium poppy eradication efforts have “failed to prevent a steady growth of opium/heroin output and exports, have alienated some Afghans without winning their support, and have shifted growing pattern to the south where drugs have become a major source of income to the Taliban.”⁶⁴

According to the UN, the number of Afghan families involved in opium poppy cultivation reached an estimated 509,000 in 2007. Although that number supposedly declined to 366,500 in 2008 (returning to the more “normal” levels of 2005 and 2006), that still amounts to more than 2.4 million people (6.5 members per household) or 10.3 percent of Afghanistan’s population.⁶⁵

Given the role of extended families and clans in Afghan society, the number of people affected is much greater than that. Indeed, it is likely that at least 30 percent of the population is involved directly or indirectly in the drug trade. For many of those people, opium poppy crops and other aspects of drug commerce make the difference between modest prosperity (by Afghan standards) and destitution. Even the UN’s Office on Drugs and Crime concedes that farmers have the highest incomes in provinces where the cultivation of opium is the most prevalent.⁶⁶ Those farmers do not look kindly on efforts to destroy their livelihood. Ekaterina Stepenova, a senior analyst at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute who has studied drug economies in conflict zones in Afghanistan and other countries, observes: “The most counterproductive thing you can do is start an eradication cam-

paign, because it pushes the peasants further to support the Taliban.”⁶⁷

A New Way Forward

In the long-term, the militancy centered along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border can be managed and to some extent contained with low-key, limited U.S. assistance. Consequently, the United States should withdraw most of its forces from Afghanistan within the next 12 to 18 months. In the interim, Washington must narrow its military objectives in Afghanistan in three critical ways:

1. At a fairly low cost, the United States can provide trainers and advisers for Afghan security forces, but training is unlikely to create a self-sustaining army or police force that can secure the country anytime in the near future.
2. The United States should sustain intelligence operations in the region, through aerial surveillance, covert operations, and ongoing intelligence-sharing with the Afghan and Pakistani governments. U.S. policymakers should seek cordial relations with all of Afghanistan’s neighbors, particularly Russia and Iran, as each has the means to significantly undermine progress in the country, and conversely, has the ability to facilitate progress.
3. The United States should abandon its broad opium eradication policy and instead only target drug cartels affiliated with insurgents. Above all, U.S.-NATO forces must not harass poor local farmers who cultivate opium poppies. Targeting the latter alienates a significant portion of the rural population, thereby benefiting insurgents and undermining our strategic objectives.

Recommendation #1: Work with Afghanistan’s Security Forces, but Be Realistic about Their Potential

In March 2009, President Obama committed 4,000 U.S. trainers to Afghanistan, while

For many Afghans, opium poppy crops and other aspects of drug commerce make the difference between modest prosperity (by Afghan standards) and destitution.

**Seventy-five
percent of the
Afghan National
Police are
illiterate.**

NATO pledged an additional 5,000 military trainers and police.⁶⁸ At that time, the Afghan National Army (ANA) had about 82,000 soldiers, a number scheduled to grow to 134,000 by the end of 2011.⁶⁹ The Afghan National Police (ANP) stands between 85,000 and 90,000;⁷⁰ it currently covers 365 districts, 46 city police precincts, and has a presence in all 34 provinces.⁷¹

But numbers tell only part of the story.

The Focused District Development program (FDD) is a district-by-district training regimen for police units. The FDD is directed by the Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan, a joint service organization under the command and control of U.S. Central Command that is responsible for equipping and training Afghan security forces. Since it began in October 2007, a mere 52 of 365 police districts have successfully completed the program, despite training camps operating at maximum capacity.⁷² The concept of proper police procedures and respect for the rights of citizens remains underdeveloped. “The first time they heard that they weren’t supposed to beat people, and they weren’t supposed to take their money, (but) that they were supposed to enforce laws and that their job was to protect the people, most police were surprised,” said Army Col. Michael J. McMahon, the FDD’s director.⁷³

According to Karen Hall, Police Program manager in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, 75 percent of the Afghan National Police are illiterate, which prevents many officers from filling out arrest reports, equipment and supply requests, and arguing before a judge or prosecutor.⁷⁴ “Paperwork, evidence, processing—they don’t know how to do it,” says Marine 1st Lt. Justin Greico. “You can’t get a policeman to take a statement if he can’t read and write.”⁷⁵

Andrew Legon, research analyst for the U.K.-based Royal United Services Institute, describes the ANP thus: “Bribes determine everything from recruitment to assignments and promotion prospects. Payoffs are extracted not only from criminals, drug runners and Taliban,

but also the general public, shopkeepers, and even the victims of crime whom the ANP are meant to be protecting. . . . Little wonder that widespread sentiment views the ANP as thieves in official uniform.”⁷⁶

In some areas, ANP members apparently kidnap and rape pre-teen children. Because of this practice, known as “bacha bazi,” locals sometimes welcome the Taliban as liberators. Mohammad Gul, an elder in the village of Pankela, says, “If the boys were out in the fields, the police would come and rape them . . . You can go to any police base and you will see these boys. They hold them until they are finished with them and then let the child go.”⁷⁷

The performance and training of the Afghan National Army has been a bit better than that of police recruits; however, that’s not saying much. For example, command and control still remains weak, and operations involving more than 100 troops cannot operate independently of coalition forces.⁷⁸

During Operation Strike of the Sword, the offensive launched in July 2009, 650 Afghan troops deployed alongside 4,000 U.S. troops to clear Taliban fighters from the lower Helmand River valley. ANA personnel are certainly gaining valuable experience and have already demonstrated some operational capacity. The ANA led 62 percent of operations in spring and summer 2008, compared to 45 percent in 2007.⁷⁹ As of March 2009, 59 out of 95 ANA units were capable of carrying out independent operations.⁸⁰

Afghan Defense minister Abdul Rahim Wardak wants to increase the total number of police officers, commandos, and border guards to 400,000. Maintaining a force that large would cost from \$10 billion to \$20 billion over the next six or seven years. But for 2008, Afghanistan’s annual revenue was a mere \$600 million. U.S. officials have yet to address that gargantuan funding problem. According to Rory Stewart, Chief Executive of Turquoise Mountain Institute, a nongovernmental organization based in Kabul, an Afghan security force of over 400,000 would cost \$2 billion to \$3 billion a year, which would force Afghanistan to spend 500 per cent of its budget.

That means the United States would be called upon to spend many billions of dollars to be Afghanistan's perpetual crutch.

But all of the money in the world, and even the best training, can never eliminate corruption or timidity. Moreover, judging from previous campaigns, we have little reason to assume that our training will produce competent Afghan soldiers, much less an entire self-sustaining army. In some cases, sustained periods of foreign-led training actually hinder the host nation's self-sufficiency. Thus, training is not a panacea. It will neither rid the security forces of corruption nor ensure that soldiers and police units operate harmoniously across tribal and ethnic lines.

Continuing training is not incredibly costly to the United States, but that assistance should support, rather than supplant, indigenous security. By dispatching more foreign troops, the United States and NATO may decrease the Afghan government's incentives to act responsibly, undermine its credibility, and discourage indigenous Afghan security initiatives.⁸¹ Going forward, training should be tied to clear metrics, such as whether Afghans can operate independent of coalition forces and can take the lead in operations against insurgents. If such benchmarks are not achieved within a reasonable timeframe, Washington should cut its losses and cease further assistance.

Recommendation #2: Exploit Intelligence Assets and Relations in the Region

The anti-Soviet jihad supported by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan later gave way to a grisly civil war among rival factions of the Afghan mujahedeen. After Soviet forces withdrew from the region, America's only intelligence asset was a CIA station in Islamabad, and even there the United States did not have Afghanistan on the official list of intelligence-gathering priorities. Throughout the 1990s, Central Asia witnessed the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan and, later, the advance of a Taliban government that would one day provide shelter to al Qaeda, the organization directly responsible

for 9/11. Without intelligence assets on the ground and monitoring overhead, the United States had no way to grasp the rising threat of Islamist radicalism until it was too late.

Today, the United States has no broad interests in the region justifying a large strategic footprint, but it does have a strong interest in gathering intelligence on militants who could one day pose a threat to the United States.

Since 9/11, America's capture of many high-level al Qaeda operatives have stemmed from intelligence-collection, sharing, and co-operation with foreign governments. Al Qaeda—a loose, decentralized network with cells around the world—will not be defeated by amassing thousands of troops in Afghanistan. David Heathcoat-Amory, a conservative member of the British Parliament, highlighted the counterproductive nature of a heavy-footed presence. He offered this well-reasoned critique of the assertion that American and European forces must remain in the region:

Does not the whole strategy suppose that there is something unique about Afghanistan? We know that the 9/11 attacks were planned in plenty of other countries, including some in Europe. Can we examine a little more carefully the idea that if we succeed in Afghanistan, that will make us more secure? That argument falls if the terrorists can move to other bases, unless we are prepared to invade every country that might harbour terrorism.⁸²

Regrettably, by doubling down on the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, the United States is giving al Qaeda leaders exactly what they want: America remains mired in a protracted guerilla war, and U.S. tactics kill and alienate noncombatants, thereby facilitating terrorist recruitment.

A smarter strategy would continue the CIA and the FBI's close cooperation with foreign law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Such close cooperation with foreign governments may be unglamorous, but it netted key

Training will neither rid the security forces of corruption nor ensure that soldiers and police units operate harmoniously across tribal and ethnic lines.

Retaining unmanned aerial vehicles and covert operations against specific targets will ensure that Osama bin Laden does not march openly through the streets of Kabul.

al Qaeda operatives, including Khalid Sheik Mohammed, the principal architect of 9/11, and Ramzi bin al Shibh, the main communications and support interface between the 9/11 operatives and the al Qaeda leadership. Such old-fashioned police and spy work would likely score future successes against key members of al Qaeda. Moreover, retaining patrols by unmanned aerial vehicles and covert operations against specific targets will ensure that Osama bin Laden does not march openly through the streets of Kabul.

Additionally, regional stakeholders, especially Russia and Iran, have an interest in a stable Afghanistan. Both countries possess the capacity to facilitate development in the country and may even be willing to assist Western forces. In July, leaders in Moscow allowed the United States to use Russian airspace to transport troops and lethal military equipment into Afghanistan. Yet another relevant regional player is the Collective Security Treaty Organization, made up of Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, and Belarus. At the moment, CSTO appears amenable to forging a security partnership with NATO. CSTO secretary general Nikolai Bordyuzha told journalists in March 2009 of his bloc's intention to cooperate. "The united position of the CSTO is that we should give every kind of aid to the anti-terror coalition operating in Afghanistan. . . . The interests of NATO and the CSTO countries regarding Afghanistan conform unequivocally."⁸³

Mutual interests between Western forces and Afghanistan's surrounding neighbors can converge on issues of transnational terrorism, the Caspian and Central Asia region's abundant energy resources, cross-border organized crime, and weapons smuggling. Enhanced cooperation alone will not stabilize Afghanistan, but engaging stakeholders may lead to tighter regional security.

Recommendation #3: Adopt a Sensible Drug Policy

The United States must tailor a more sophisticated approach to the drug war, as attempts to wage a war against Afghanistan's

involvement in the illegal drug trade impede the mission to combat al Qaeda and its allies.⁸⁴ U.S. Special Envoy for South Asia Richard Holbrooke admits that through our drug eradication efforts, "We are recruiting the Taliban with our tax dollars."⁸⁵

Given the country's economic and social realities, a comprehensive drug eradication campaign is an unrealistic and dangerous objective. Efforts to eradicate poppy crops have driven poor farmers into the arms of the Taliban.

U.S. and NATO military leaders have long recognized that danger.⁸⁶ Yet pressure from politicians and civilian drug warriors is making it difficult for the military to continue that wise restraint. In early 2009, NATO supreme commander General John Craddock responded to political and diplomatic pressure by circulating a draft order to "attack directly drug producers and facilities throughout Afghanistan." Commanders on the ground in Afghanistan, however, quietly warned Craddock about the dangers that such a dramatic escalation of anti-drug efforts would pose to the overall counter-insurgency mission. Craddock then backtracked and toned down his edict.⁸⁷ The result is that NATO forces, while officially committed to cracking down on the narcotics trade, are still reluctant to fully satisfy the objectives of zealous civilian officials regarding that issue.

Under pressure from Washington, President Karzai called on the Afghan people to wage war against narcotics with the same determination and ferocity that they resisted the Soviet occupation in the 1980s.⁸⁸ That is both unrealistic and dangerous. On the ground, Afghan-led eradication efforts should, at most, merely target drug cartels affiliated with al Qaeda. The Obama administration's recently announced shift in drug policy, from eradication to interdiction, is mildly encouraging.⁸⁹

Too much U.S. pressure on the drug issue has the potential to undermine anti-Islamist political allies. That is especially true with crop eradication schemes. If Afghan leaders continue to cave in to U.S./NATO pressure on the drug issue, they risk becoming entangled in a

needless war with a significant portion of their own population.⁹⁰ In fact, supporters of the drug trade are already striking back with greater frequency. An onslaught of attacks in 2008 left dozens of counter-narcotics police dead and caused poppy eradication teams to beat a hasty retreat. More recent efforts have relied on NATO and Afghan army units to support the poppy police.⁹¹

An emphasis on counter-narcotics measures is a worrisome mistake. Taliban and al Qaeda forces are showing an alarming strength, especially in the southern part of the country. If zealous American drug warriors alienate hundreds of thousands of Afghan farmers, an already bad situation could become considerably worse.

U.S. officials need to keep their priorities straight. The United States' mortal enemy is al Qaeda and its allies. The drug war is a dangerous distraction in the campaign to defeat those forces. Recognizing that security considerations sometimes trump other objectives would hardly be an unprecedented move by Washington. U.S. agencies quietly ignored the drug trafficking activities of anti-communist factions in Central America during the 1980s when the primary goal was to keep those countries out of the Soviet orbit.⁹² In the early 1990s, the United States also eased its pressure on Peru's government regarding the drug eradication issue when President Alberto Fujimori concluded that a higher priority had to be given to winning coca farmers away from the Maoist Shining Path guerrilla movement.⁹³

U.S. officials should adopt a similar pragmatic policy in Afghanistan and not become the enemy of Afghan farmers whose livelihood depends on opium poppy cultivation. True, some funds from the drug trade will find their way into the coffers of the Taliban and al Qaeda. That is an inevitable side effect of a global prohibitionist policy that creates such an enormous profit from illegal drugs. But alienating pro-Western Afghan factions in an effort to disrupt the flow of revenue to the Islamic radicals is too high a price to pay. Washington should avoid putting pressure

on the Afghan government to pursue crop eradication programs and undermine the economic well-being of its own population. U.S. leaders also should refrain from trying to make U.S. soldiers into anti-drug crusaders; soldiers have a difficult enough job fighting their terrorist adversaries in Afghanistan. Even those policymakers who oppose ending the war on drugs as a general matter ought to recognize that, in this case, the war against al Qaeda—not drugs—must take priority.

Conclusion

Washington needs to “define success down” with respect to its objectives in Afghanistan.⁹⁴ Foreign policy, like domestic politics, is the art of the attainable. The U.S.-NATO coalition can carry out the focused and limited mission of training Afghan security forces, but even the best training might not produce a fully functioning and independent army or police force. Additionally, intelligence-collection in the region should continue, so as not to repeat the mistakes made prior to 9/11. And finally, as long as U.S. and NATO troops remain in the region, they should adopt a pragmatic approach to drug policy by not alienating Afghan farmers and non-Islamist power brokers.

The United States should begin a prompt withdrawal of most of its military forces from Afghanistan. Denying a sanctuary to terrorists that seek to attack the United States does not require Washington to pacify the entire country or sustain a large, long-term military presence in Central Asia. The region holds little intrinsic strategic value to the United States, and America's security will not be endangered even if U.S. forces cannot achieve a knockout blow against al Qaeda. America's objective should be to neutralize the parties responsible for the atrocities committed on 9/11. The United States should not go beyond that objective by combating a localized insurgency or drifting into an open-ended occupation and nation-building effort.

Washington needs to “define success down” with respect to its objectives in Afghanistan.

Notes

1. "International Security Assistance Force and Afghan National Army Strength and Laydown," NATO Headquarters Media Operations Centre—Afghanistan, July 2009, <http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat.pdf>. The military's population-centric counterinsurgency doctrine suggests 20 to 25 troops per 1,000 indigenous people. For Afghanistan, that would bring foreign troop levels to well above 650,000. Given the substantially fewer number of troops able to be deployed, in the years ahead, if the mission is not succeeding, people who support an open-ended presence will cry "surge," "if only," and "not enough." However, the shortage of troops is not an argument for more troops, but for not injecting U.S. troops into unwinnable, unnecessary, asymmetric wars.
2. According to the field manual, "The cornerstone of any [counterinsurgency] effort is establishing security for the civilian populace." See *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 1–3.
3. "Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan," Department of Defense, January 2009, http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/OCTOBER_1230_FINAL.pdf, p. 30.
4. Paul Avallone, "Next Stop: Afghanistan," *Army Magazine* 58, no. 4 (April 2008): 63–70.
5. Julian E. Barnes, "In Afghanistan Conflict, Pentagon Considers Structural Changes," *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 2009.
6. Colin Jackson and Austin Long, "The Fifth Service: The Rise of Special Operations Command," in *U.S. Military Innovation since the Cold War*, ed. Harvey Sapolsky, Benjamin Friedman, and Brendan Green (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2009).
7. Dana Priest and Ann Scott Tyson, "Bin Laden Trail 'Stone Cold,'" *Washington Post*, September 10, 2006. As commander of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), McChrystal was given the authority to "follow the target" even if that means entering Pakistan, as long as the target is one of extreme value, such as Osama bin Laden or Ayman al Zawahiri.
8. "White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan," March 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/Afghanistan-Pakistan_White_Paper.pdf.
9. "Transcript: President Obama, Part 2," CBS News, March, 20, 2009, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/03/24/60minutes/main4890687.shtml>.
10. "More Troops, Civilian Trainers to Head to Afghanistan under New Strategy," *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, March 27, 2009, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/asia/jan-june09/afghan_03-27.html.
11. Bruce Riedel, "Are We Losing Afghanistan?" *The Daily Beast*, July 5, 2009, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2009-07-05/are-we-losing-afghanistan/>.
12. Frederick W. Kagan, "Planning Victory in Afghanistan: Nine Principles the Obama Administration Should Follow," *National Review Online*, February 9, 2009.
13. Christopher Drew, "Drones Are Weapons of Choice in Fighting Qaeda," *New York Times*, March 16, 2009.
14. For more, see Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Knopf, 2006), p. 278.
15. Meredith Buel, "NATO Entering New Stage in Afghanistan," *Voice of America News*, June 25, 2009.
16. A new fear gripping Washington is al Qaeda's financing and technical assistance to Pakistani Taliban groups. See Mark Mazzetti and Eric Schmitt, "Shaky Pakistan Is Seen as Target of Qaeda Plot," *New York Times*, May 10, 2009; and Joby Warrick and R. Jeffrey Smith, "Gains in Pakistan Fuel Pentagon Optimism for Pursuing Al-Qaeda," *Washington Post*, June 13, 2009.
17. Glenn L. Carle, "Overstating Our Fears," *Washington Post*, July, 13, 2008.
18. John Mueller, *Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats and Why We Believe Them* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).
19. "Afghanistan: Internationalism vs. Isolationism," Foreign Policy Initiative, March 31, 2009, http://www.foreignpolicy.org/event_trans.php.
20. Juan Cole, "Obama's Domino Theory," *Salon*, March 30, 2009, <http://www.salon.com/opinion/feature/2009/03/30/afghanistan/print.html>.
21. Christian Tripodi, "Britain's Strategy toward the North-West Frontier, 1901–1945," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 1 (February 2008): 135.
22. Seth Jones and Martin Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qaeda* (Santa

- Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008), http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG741-1.pdf, p. xvi.
23. For more on this subject, see Christopher Preble and Justin Logan, "Failed States and Flawed Logic: The Case against a Standing Nation-Building Office," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 560, January 11, 2006.
24. Anand Gopal, "Briefing: Who Are the Taliban?" *Christian Science Monitor*, April 16, 2009.
25. Another U.S. practice that has increased terrorist recruitment in the region is the launching of air strikes into northwest Pakistan. Air strikes are meant to disrupt terrorist sanctuaries across the border, but they also metastasize the pool of Pakistani Taliban and further destabilize Islamabad's secular civilian government. David Kilcullen, counterinsurgency adviser to Gen. David Petraeus, and Andrew Exum, an Army officer who served in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2002 to 2004, argue, "Every one of these dead noncombatants represents an alienated family, a new desire for revenge, and more recruits for a militant movement that has grown exponentially even as drone strikes have increased." "Death from Above, Outrage Down Below," *New York Times*, May 16, 2009.
26. Henry A. Kissinger, "A Strategy for Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, February 26, 2009; and Stephen Biddle, "Is It Worth It? The Difficult Case for War in Afghanistan," *The American Interest*, July-August 2009.
27. "Bush Invokes 'Tragedy of Vietnam' against Iraq Pullout," CNN.com, August 22, 2007, <http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/08/22/bush.iraq.speech/index.html>.
28. Michael Rubin, review of *Exiting Iraq: Why the U.S. Must End the Military Occupation and Renew the War against al Qaeda*, by Christopher Preble, *Middle East Quarterly* (Fall 2004), <http://www.aei.org/article/21570>.
29. The editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal* embraced this rationale in their eulogy of Robert McNamara, July 9, 2009.
30. Ivan Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 151.
31. Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions ("Bonn Agreement") [Afghanistan], S/2001/1154, December 5, 2001, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3f48f4754.html>.
32. Marin Strmecki, Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing on Strategic Options in Afghanistan and Pakistan, February 26, 2009, <http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2009/February/Strmecki%2002-26-09.pdf>.
33. Lawrence J. Korb et al., "Sustainable Security in Afghanistan: Crafting an Effective and Responsible Strategy for the Forgotten Front," *Center for American Progress*, March 29, 2009, http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/03/sustainable_afghanistan.html.
34. For an analysis of poverty in Afghanistan, see *Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008–2013*, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, April 21, 2008, <http://www.embassyofafghanistan.org/strategy.html>, p. 27. For more on poor economic development, see William Maley, *Rescuing Afghanistan* (University of New South Wales Press, 2007), p. 79. For estimates on average life expectancy, see Patrick Cockburn, "How the West Lost Its Way in the East," *The Independent*, March 27, 2009; and "The Cost of War in Afghanistan," American Friends Services Committee, April 14, 2009. To read more about problems of infant mortality, see Martin Patience, "The Struggle to Save Afghan Mothers," BBC, October 4, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/7646821.stm>; and Fawad Sahil, "UNICEF and Partners Come Together to Help Reduce Maternal Mortality in Afghanistan," United Nations Children's Fund, April 2, 2007, www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_39281.html; and "Afghanistan: Background," www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_background.html. For statistics on literacy, see Lydia Mihelic Pulsipher and Alex Pulsipher, *World Regional Geography: Global Patterns, Local Lives*, 4th ed. (New York: W. H. Freeman, 2007), p. 455.
35. The United States is committed to helping Afghanistan's "judicial systems function openly and equitably and can be trusted to protect and serve the population as a whole." Description on USAJOBS of a "PRT Rule of Law Advisor (ASO)."
36. Katie Carter, "For Love of Afghanistan," *Artizan Sarai*, April 2007, http://www.artizansarai.com/press_divine.htm.
37. Heidi Vogt and Amir Shah, "TV Manager Arrested over 'Bare Limbs,'" *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 26, 2009, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/tv-manager-arrested-for-showing-womens-bare-limbs-20090325-9ahm.html>.
38. Aria Abawi, "Afghanistan 'Rape' Law Puts Women's Rights Front and Center," CNN, April 7, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/04/06/afghanistan.law/>; and Graeme Smith, "Air Strikes, War on Drugs Drive Taliban," *Globe and Mail*, March 24, 2008.

39. "The Arrested Development of Afghan Women," *The Future of Afghanistan*, ed. J. Alexander Their (Washington: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2009), p. 65. Maliha Zulfacar, Afghan ambassador to Germany, also argues that the Afghan government must avoid a pendulum effect, where moderate government reforms are followed by policies that concede to fundamentalist and conservative elements. See Maliha Zulfacar, "The Pendulum of Gender Politics in Afghanistan," *Central Asian Survey* 25, nos. 1 and 2 (2006): 27-59.
40. It was first assumed that Afghan militias could bring order to the country, but they were more interested in terrorizing locals, extorting bribes and seizing land. See Nir Rosen, "How We Lost the War We Won: A Journey into Taliban-controlled Afghanistan," *Rolling Stone*, October 30, 2008.
41. Thomas Johnson, "Tribal Politics: Why We Must Understand the Human Terrain," *Vanguard*, 2008, <http://www.vanguardcanada.com/AfghanTribalPoliticsJohnson>.
42. George Friedman, "Afghanistan: The Nature of the Insurgency," *Stratfor*, June 1, 2009.
43. Nick Dowling, "Travels with Nick #4," May 7, 2009, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2009/05/travels-with-nick-4/>.
44. "The Pashtuns' social construction of *tribe* is based on an idealized egalitarian model of segmentary lineages, although the actual structures are far more various. . . . In order to make these egalitarian tribes into a more effective military force, the Safavid Shahs imposed elements of the Turco-Mongolian tribal structure onto those Pashtuns living in their territories. It was due to their efforts that Abdali (later Durrani) and Ghilzai Pashtuns developed Turkic-style confederations." See Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 28-29.
45. Hassan Abbas, "Pakistan's Volatile North-West Frontier: Pashtun Tribes, Taliban, and al Qaeda," December 14, 2006, The Jamestown Foundation, [http://www.jamestown.org/media/events/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=132&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=19&cHash=054051a46e](http://www.jamestown.org/media/events/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=132&tx_ttnews[backPid]=19&cHash=054051a46e).
46. David B. Edwards, *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 216
47. Influential Durrani Pashtun clans include Popalzai, Barakzai (Mohammadzai), Sadozai, Ali-kazai, and others. Many Ghilzai clans in the coun-try's east, such as Hotak, Tokhi, Nasr, and Taraki, as well as some historically marginalized Durrani clans, such as those in the Panjpai Valley and some in Kandahar province, including Alizai, Ahmadzai, Noorzai, and Ishaqzai, have limited representation in the Afghan government.
48. "Petreaus Sees Value in Talking to Taliban," Reuters, October 8, 2008; and Jonathan Karl and Luis Martinez, "Bush Administration to Talk with Taliban?" *ABC News*, October 28, 2008.
49. Ashley J. Tellis, "Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy in Afghanistan," *Carnegie Report*, April 2009, p. 3.
50. Col. Sam Gardiner, USAF (ret.) and Erik Leaver, "Planning for Failure in Afghanistan," *Foreign Policy in Focus: Commentary*, March 30, 2009, <http://www.fpiif.org/fpiftxt/6000>.
51. Tellis, "Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy in Afghanistan," p. 5; and Buel, "NATO Entering New Stage in Afghanistan."
52. Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, March 2009*, p. 106.
53. Eric Felten, Interview with Thomas Donnelly, *On the Line*, Voice of America, September 2, 2006.
54. Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, p. 23.
55. Lisa Curtis and James Phillips, "Revitalizing U.S. Efforts in Afghanistan," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder no. 2076, October 15, 2007, http://www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/bg2076.cfm#_ftnref36.
56. "Afghanistan's Narco War: Breaking the Link Between Drug Traffickers and Insurgents," A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 111th Congress, 1st Session, August 10, 2009, p. 10.
57. *Ibid*, pp. 4-5, 11-12.
58. James Risen, "Reports Link Karzai's Brother to Afghanistan Heroin Trade," *New York Times*, October 5, 2008. Karzai has, however, vehemently denied those allegations. Fisnik Abrashi, "Karzai's Brother Denies Links to Drug Trade," Reuters, October 6, 2008.
59. Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, p. 110.
60. Tom Lasseter, "West Looked the Other Way as

- Afghan Drug Trade Exploded,” McClatchy, May 10, 2009.
61. Tom Lasseter, “Thriving Afghan Drug Trade Has Friends in High Places,” McClatchy, May 10, 2009.
62. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “Afghanistan Opium Winter Assessment,” January 2009, p. 8.
63. Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Peacekeepers among Poppies: Afghanistan, Illicit Economies, and Intervention,” *International Peacekeeping* 16, no. 1 (February 2009): 108.
64. Anthony H. Cordesman, “Analyzing the Afghan-Pakistan War,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 28, 2008, http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/080728_afghan_analyses.pdf, p. 12.
65. UNODC, “Afghanistan Opium Survey 2008, Executive Summary,” August 2008, p. 1, 12.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
67. Quoted in Lasseter, “West Looked the Other Way.”
68. Henry Chu and Christi Parsons, “NATO Leaders Name New Secretary-General,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 2009, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/apr/05/world/fg-obama-nato5>.
69. “Fact Sheet Afghan National Army,” Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, March 15, 2009, <http://www.cstc-a.com/mission/Afghan%20Army%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>.
70. Greg Bruno, “Afghan’s National Security Forces,” Council on Foreign Relations, April 16, 2009, http://www.cfr.org/publication/19122/afghan_national_security_forces.html?breadcrumb=%2Fbios%2F13554%2Fgreg_bruno.
71. “Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan,” U.S. Department of Defense, January 2009, http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/OCTOBER_1230_FINAL.pdf.
72. Government Accountability Office, “Afghanistan Security: U.S. Efforts to Develop Capable Afghan Police Forces Face Challenges and Need a Coordinated, Detailed Plan to Help Ensure Accountability,” June 18, 2008, <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-08-883T>.
73. John J. Kruzal, “Afghan Police Culture Evolves through ‘Focused District Development,’” *American Forces Press Service*, May 19, 2008, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=49929>.
74. United States Institute of Peace, “Policing Afghanistan: A Meeting of the Security Sector Reform Working Group,” May 27, 2009.
75. Ann Scott Tyson, “Dearth of Capable Afghan Forces Complicates U.S. Mission in South,” *Washington Post*, July 25, 2009.
76. Andrew Legon, “Ineffective, Unprofessional, and Corrupt: The Afghan National Police Challenge,” *E-Notes*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, June 2009, <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/200906.legon.afghannationalpolice.html>.
77. Peter Graff, “Afghans Turn to Taliban in Fear of Own Police,” Reuters, July 12, 2009.
78. Gilles Dorransoro, “The Taliban’s Winning Strategy in Afghanistan,” *Carnegie Report*, June 2009, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/taliban_winning_strategy.pdf, p. 19.
79. C. J. Radin, “Afghan National Army: February 2009 Update,” *The Long War Journal*, February 23, 2009, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/02/afghan_national_army_1.php.
80. Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, “Fact Sheet Afghan National Army,” March 15, 2009, <http://www.cstc-a.com/mission/Afghan%20Army%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>.
81. Rory Stewart, “How to Save Afghanistan,” *Time*, July 28, 2008, p. 33.
82. “Global Security: Afghanistan,” Uncorrected Transcript of Oral Evidence, House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, February 25, 2009, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmfaff/uc302-i/uc30202.htm>.
83. Radio Free Europe, “Ex-Soviet States Pledge NATO Help on Afghanistan,” Radio Liberty, March 2009, http://www.rferl.org/content/ExSoviet_Group_Pledges_NATO_Help_On_Afghanistan/1513854.html.
84. For an earlier discussion of the acute tensions between the U.S./NATO counterinsurgency mission in Afghanistan and counternarcotics efforts, see Ted Galen Carpenter, “How the Drug War in Afghanistan Undermines America’s War on Terror,” Cato Institute Foreign Policy Briefing no. 84, November 10, 2004.
85. Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “U.S. Pursues a New Way to Rebuild Afghanistan,” *Washington Post*, June 19, 2009; and Thom Shanker and Elisabeth Bumiller, “U.S. Shifts Afghan Narcotics Strategy,”

New York Times, July 24, 2009.

86. Thomas Schweich, a former Bush administration ambassador for counternarcotics and justice reform for Afghanistan, stated in May 2009 that the Western military “didn’t want anything to do with either interdiction or counternarcotics.” When asked what U.S. and NATO forces had done to halt the flow of opium and heroin in southern Afghanistan (the center of the drug trade), an Afghan military commander, Col. General Khodaidad, replied bluntly: “Nothing.” Quoted in Lasseter, “West Looked the Other Way.”

87. “NATO Commander Tones Down Drug Lord Orders,” Agence France Presse, February 4, 2009.

88. Sayed Salahuddin, “Afghan President Says ‘Fight Drugs Like Soviets,’” Reuters, December 9, 2004.

89. “U.S. Announces Revamp of Afghan Drug Policy,” Associated Press, June 27, 2009.

90. Even reasonably useful analyses of the Afghan drug trade tend to underestimate that danger. See, for example, Gretchen Peters, *Seeds of Terror: How Heroin Is Bankrolling the Taliban and al Qaeda* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009).

91. Bronwen Roberts, “Afghan Poppy Police Call in Troops,” Agence France Presse, February 8, 2009. An especially bad incident occurred in April 2008. See Jon Hemming, “Suicide Bomb on Poppy Team Kills 18 Afghans,” Reuters, April 29, 2008.

92. Walter Pincus, “CIA Ignored Tips Alleging Contra Drug Links, Report Says,” *Washington Post*, November 3, 1998, p. A4.

93. Ted Galen Carpenter, *Bad Neighbor Policy: Washington’s Futile War on Drugs in Latin America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) pp. 141–42.

94. Richard N. Haass, “Defining ‘Success’ Down,” *Washington Post*, May 14, 2009.

Cato Institute

Founded in 1977, the Cato Institute is a public policy research foundation dedicated to broadening the parameters of policy debate to allow consideration of more options that are consistent with the traditional American principles of limited government, individual liberty, and peace. To that end, the Institute strives to achieve greater involvement of the intelligent, concerned lay public in questions of policy and the proper role of government.

The Institute is named for *Cato's Letters*, libertarian pamphlets that were widely read in the American Colonies in the early 18th century and played a major role in laying the philosophical foundation for the American Revolution.

Despite the achievement of the nation's Founders, today virtually no aspect of life is free from government encroachment. A pervasive intolerance for individual rights is shown by government's arbitrary intrusions into private economic transactions and its disregard for civil liberties.

To counter that trend, the Cato Institute undertakes an extensive publications program that addresses the complete spectrum of policy issues. Books, monographs, and shorter studies are commissioned to examine the federal budget, Social Security, regulation, military spending, international trade, and myriad other issues. Major policy conferences are held throughout the year, from which papers are published thrice yearly in the *Cato Journal*. The Institute also publishes the quarterly magazine *Regulation*.

In order to maintain its independence, the Cato Institute accepts no government funding. Contributions are received from foundations, corporations, and individuals, and other revenue is generated from the sale of publications. The Institute is a nonprofit, tax-exempt, educational foundation under Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code.

CATO INSTITUTE
1000 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001
www.cato.org

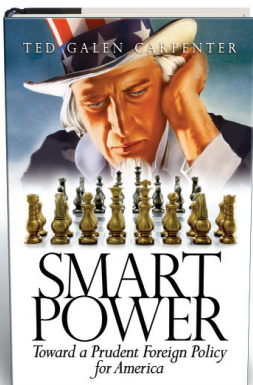
Studies from the



Cato's publications, including the Policy Analysis series, offer detailed and authoritative studies of a wide range of pressing public policy issues. Each study presents a sharply focused look behind and inside the topic covered. Available online at Cato.org, these incisive studies form the heart of Cato's important work.

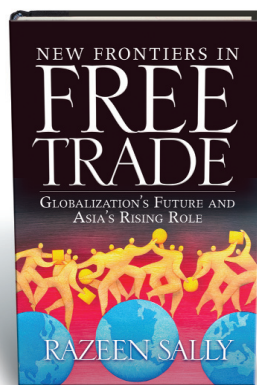
RECENT CATO STUDIES INCLUDE

- NATO at 60: A Hollow Alliance
- Corruption, Mismanagement, and Abuse of Power in Hugo Chávez's Venezuela
- Zimbabwe: From Hyperinflation to Growth
- Troubled Neighbor: Mexico's Drug Violence Poses a Threat to the United States
- Learning the Right Lessons from Iraq



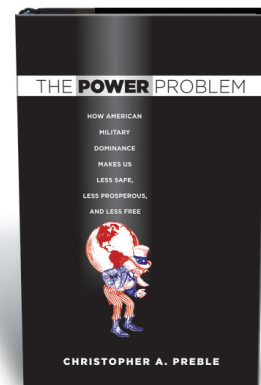
“In an age of imperial folly and militarized illusions, Carpenter has been a voice of reason and good sense.”

— **ANDREW J. BACEVICH**
\$24.95 HARDCOVER



“This short book is the best and most important volume on trade in years.”

— **CLIVE CROOK**
\$18.95 HARDCOVER



“Preble provides a useful guide that policymakers and the American public should consider before sending our troops into harm's way.”

— **LAWRENCE J. KORB**
\$25 HARDCOVER

Additional details and ordering information for Cato's books and Policy Studies are available online at www.cato.org.

