

AFGHANISTAN IN THE BALANCE: *AIR POLITIK*

BY

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APPROVAL

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DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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In early 2001, while stationed in Los Angeles, I was affected profoundly by the Taliban's destruction of two ancient statues, the Buddas of Bamyán, in Afghanistan. Since the sixth century, these two archeological marvels survived intact before explosives rendered them into piles of dust in a few short seconds. The images of their fall, in many ways, foreshadowed the destruction of the two great skyscrapers in New York on 11 September 2001. Someday someone will superimpose the videos to communicate the irony of their coincidence. During that year, I thought that one day, the United States might be involved in Afghanistan. Little did I know how true that would be and that my choices in life would involve me in it personally.

Serious questions about Afghanistan puzzled me for years. Why is it in the US national interest to be there? How is the American experience different than past interventions? Why did the people there escape the forces of globalization? Why do other nations care about Afghanistan? The desire for answers compelled me to study the balance of power in the region, why Afghanistan was a vital interest, and how air power might better contribute. This thesis helped with the answers. If there were ever a time for Afghanistan to be something greater than it is, it is now.

ABSTRACT

The United States faces a classic challenge in Afghanistan, the graveyard of empires, as it attempts to meet its pragmatic security interests. The rugged, landlocked terrain has provided historic sanctuary for its warrior-tribes and safe havens for terrorist groups that have attacked and continue to threaten America. Afghanistan's geographic and cultural realities favor insurgency as a normal form of warfare. The context in Afghanistan is different today than it has been in the past, however, and the military forces available to the US are more mobile, effective, and powerful than ever before. These capabilities emanate from its unprecedented *airpower*, without which the United States would have no seat at the balance-of-power table in Central Asia. If it employs its airpower *responsibly*, America can help sow the seeds of a previously unknown creation—a stable, economically vibrant Afghanistan.

The balance-of-power dynamics of the nineteenth century *Great Game* in Afghanistan between Britain and Russia reveal timeless patterns of realist behavior. The record of airpower's use (and misuse) in the twentieth century informs the failures of Britain and the Soviet Union and instructs the employment of airpower by the United States today. Because Afghanistan will continue to be strategically important to its neighbors, strategists must understand the motivations of internal actors, regional states, and the great powers, all of whom influence the strategy of intervening powers. Fortunately, America does not stand alone in waging counterinsurgency. A 60-nation partnership aims to transform Afghanistan. Airpower can help provide the time and space necessary to effect a positive transformation.

To harness the potential of modern airpower, strategists and policy-makers can gain significant insights from Afghanistan's turbulent history, especially from the airpower period beginning in 1919. These narratives reveal that the key to success or failure of either a foreign intervention or a viable Afghan central government depends upon an historic force of nature—the unconquered and perhaps unconquerable Afghan tribes. The use of force at any scale has always rallied tribal groups against a foreign presence. Force incites them to act on an ancient tribal code to avenge wrongs and inspires Jihad—a perfectly suited ideological weapon to unify the tribes against a foreign presence. Historical record shows that when used as a coercive weapon, airpower sacrifices strategic success for tactical gains. Instead of pouring gasoline on a tribal fire, kinetic airpower should be—and has been—sensibly constrained. This thesis evaluates the new strategy implemented by General Stanley McChrystal, in which airpower's destructive potential has been minimized, and offers additional suggestions for how airpower's advantages in mobility and transportation, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and integrated strategic planning can be maximized.

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Introduction

America and its allies continue to spend significant resources and effort to stabilize Afghanistan—an historically dysfunctional tribal confederation that has resisted external occupation for millennia. After nine years of war, a resurgent Taliban and a degraded, yet unbeaten al-Qaeda threaten both the Afghan Central government and the stability of a nuclear-armed Pakistan. The International Security Assistance Force Commander, General Stanley McChrystal, provided a sobering assessment of Taliban progress in Afghanistan and proposed a new military strategy that relies heavily on counterinsurgency methods.¹ After months of careful review and advice, President Obama decided on a course of action and ordered US military commanders to execute a new plan. On December 1, 2009, in a televised address, President Obama explained the reasons why the war in Afghanistan is in the United States' security interests.² He described a new military strategy for the region that emphasizes counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and counter-terrorism in Pakistan. The new policy has significant implications for international and regional cooperation between nation-states.

The international community, led by the United States, continues to pay extraordinary attention to Afghanistan. Since 2001, the United States has spent over \$38 billion in aid³ and an estimated \$227 billion in aggregate war costs.⁴ Between summer 2010 and July 2011, one hundred thousand American troops will attempt to reverse a growing Taliban insurgency. Though tested, co-operation between the United States and non-traditional partners

¹ Stanley McChrystal, "Commander's Initial Assessment," (NATO International Security Assistance Force and US Forces Afghanistan, 30 Aug 2009).

² B. Obama, "Remarks at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York," *Daily Compilation of Presidential Documents* (2009).

³ Curt Tarnoff, "Afghanistan: U.S. Foreign Assistance," (Congressional Research Service, 2009), 1.

⁴ Amy Belasco, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations since 9/11," (Congressional Research Service, 2009), 2.

has remained unprecedented.⁵ As of April 2010, one of the largest coalitions in human history, involving forty-five nations, is deployed to Afghanistan.⁶ These nations plan to create a secure environment for the indigenous Afghan people to build and sustain security, governance, and economic functions. This international coalition and the Islamic State of Afghanistan fight against a group of non-state actors in a physical struggle for control of the population.

Time will reveal whether the lead nation, the United States of America, will have its name added to an already impressive heap of failed interventions in Afghanistan. Believing that a stable Afghanistan is critical for its security interests, America continues an expensive whole-of-government, international, and regional approach. Still, in December 2009, the President of the United States gave the collective effort in Afghanistan an eighteen-month time limit, after which American forces will begin withdrawal. But the outcome of counterinsurgency efforts depends upon more than just what happens within Afghanistan. The effort also depends upon actors outside Afghanistan.

Bordering nations such as China, Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, influence the dynamics of this contest in meaningful ways. Each attempts to gain advantage by manipulating conditions within Afghanistan. Their actions directly contribute to or hinder the counterinsurgency strategy. When interests do not align completely between these states and with the United States, behaviors emerge that are contrary to America's interests in stabilizing the country. The situation becomes even

⁵ Shortly after September 11, 2001, international will to cooperate with the United States was impressive. In 2010, the level of support remains high even as some coalition partners have set deadlines to leave the coalition.

⁶ NATO reports a coalition of 46 nations involved in Afghanistan. United States Central Command expands the number to 61 coalition partners by including non-combat contributions. In comparison, World War I and World War II had coalitions of 24 and 26 nation-states respectively. The Persian Gulf War of 1991 had a coalition of 38 states. Likewise, the coalition for the Iraq War in 2003 consisted of 49 nations, of which only five engaged in combat. See: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO's Role in Afghanistan," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_8189.htm (accessed 11 May 2009) and International Security Assistance Force, "ISAF Key Facts and Figures" <http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/Placemats/Apr-16-2010-placemat.pdf> (accessed 11 May 2009). See also: United States Central Command website, <http://www.centcom.mil/en/countries/coalition/> (accessed 11 May 2009).

more complex when considering how the actions of Russia and India factor into the strategic calculation. These complex state interactions drive a shifting balance of power in the region.

The shift in balance of power is driven by a number of factors. Economic aid can increase Afghanistan's capacity to provide services to its people. Bilateral and multilateral agreements establish new trade routes, create plans for potential oil pipelines, and develop access to Afghanistan's strategic minerals and water resources. In combination with aid, economic agreements, and other means, airpower influences the balance of power in ways that both negatively and positively affect America's strategy.

In the context of Afghanistan, airpower makes distinct contributions to the shifting balance. Use of the air is a major reason that the United States can project itself into balance of power interactions from approximately 7,000 miles away. In other words, it is airpower that enables America to be a major player at the table. But the balance of power determines whether or not the United States has the ability to fully use this form of power. For example, America depends upon surrounding nations and other interested parties for overflight permissions and bases at intermediate locations en route to Afghanistan. As a result, a structure emerges that is reflective of—and at the same time interactively constructing—the shifting regional balance of power. In other words, airpower changes the regional balance of power, but balance of power changes the emphasis of and responsible use of airpower as prescribed by America's way of war.⁷

Airpower also affects Afghanistan internally. Indeed, it has changed the political make-up of Afghanistan. The American-sponsored capacity to challenge Soviet airpower with Stinger missiles in the 1980s led to the downfall

⁷ See two sources: Russell Frank Weigley, *The American Way of War : A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*, Indiana University Press paperback ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977). and Max Boot, "The New American Way of War," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 4 (2003).

of the puppet regime.⁸ Twenty years later, American airpower enabled the assault that decisively removed the Taliban government from power. Since 2001, ground forces have counted on airpower to provide the necessary edge to allow small teams to overwhelm superior numbers of insurgent forces. Tactically, only airpower has allowed twelve-man special operations teams consistently to defeat hundreds-strong collections of indigenous fighters. Mobility airpower supplied America's army units stationed throughout the country. Intelligence, Surveillance, & Reconnaissance (ISR) from the air delivered hundreds of thousands of hours of video used to monitor government elections, track high value individuals, and protect civilian projects.

Clearly, airpower has changed the manner in which balance of power is calculated and leveraged in Afghanistan, but not all emergent capacities are positive; there remains a significant downside. While airpower provided tactical and operational benefits, it also resulted in destruction, collateral damage, and insurgent deaths that threatened the overall strategy. Even as airpower efficiently and effectively destroyed insurgent strongholds or eliminated previously protected enemy combatants, its perceived over use has undoubtedly led to the creation of more insurgents. Such outcomes generated negative trends within Afghanistan and the frontier regions of Pakistan. Adversaries exploited these events using information operations to contest the air. By relating these events to broader themes about the danger of foreign presence, adversaries attacked America's strategy; a strategy reliant upon and inextricable from its asymmetric advantage through airpower.

This risk to an air-centric strategy becomes more meaningful in the context of Afghanistan where indigenous tribal people adhere to an ancient code, called Pashtunwali, which requires the avenging of wrongs.⁹ If used irresponsibly, airpower may provoke a historically powerful force, the tribes, to rally against the central government and foreign presence. Indeed, the tribes

⁸ Edgar O'Ballance, *Afghan Wars, 1839-1992: What Britain Gave up and the Soviet Union Lost*, 1st English ed. (London; New York: Brassey's, 1993).

⁹ Hilton Isabel, "The Pashtun Code," *The New Yorker* 77, no. 38 (2001).

have been a major reason that foreign interventions and Afghan central governments failed or succeeded in the past. When the tribes were sufficiently provoked, the balance of power between the central government and the tribes tipped in favor of greater instability. If the current Afghan state falters, the region may relapse to previous balance of power games that make Afghanistan an unproductive, poor, unstable buffer state and a Mecca for extremists. Worse, instability may spread further, into Pakistan and out to other Central Asian states.

On the other hand, airpower employed responsibly has the potential for high payoff. If it were to become a significant state capability, Afghanistan's central government could use airpower to strengthen connections with its population along security, economic, and governance lines of operation. If America and the coalition were to accelerate Afghan capacity, then they could confidently reduce their presence in country. If surrounding nations and other stakeholders continue to allow America's airpower to reach Afghanistan, then conflict and reconstruction could progress in a manner that builds economic relationships. A responsible use of airpower within the overall strategy can help Afghanistan become, once again, the geostrategic bastion that connects Middle Eastern, Asian, and Indian markets and stabilizes border state relations. Furthermore, America may be able to create a balance of power within and external to Afghanistan favorable to its own pragmatic security interests.

Strategy Matters

Carl von Clausewitz asserted that the outcome of war is never final. The vigor of war slackens while an apparently defeated adversary waits for future political conditions to change in its favor before stepping up and renewing the conflict.¹⁰ Such is the case in Afghanistan today. Driven away by force, key Taliban and al Qaeda personnel melted back into Afghanistan's population or

¹⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Eliot Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 80.

escaped to sanctuaries in Pakistan. There, they waited for and exploited advantageous conditions to foment an insurgency. Between 2005 and 2006, violence expanded to more areas within the country.¹¹ Adding to and perhaps playing into the Taliban and al Qaeda strategy, America did not significantly change its approach until a new Presidential administration came to power.

President Obama's administration made several critical decisions. Based on recommendations of military commanders, the President twice committed additional forces to Afghanistan. He further assigned a new commanding officer, General Stanley McChrystal, who has impressive credentials and legendary personal resolve, to lead a reinvigorated effort. The administration properly recognized the need for a new civilian and military strategy, one based on counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism, in this highly dynamic environment.

Most importantly, and in the face of pessimistic opinions, the President reconfirmed that operations in Afghanistan remain a significant national security interest of the United States. To implement the new strategy effectively, Congress and the American people must also believe that the war in Afghanistan is a national security interest. Without such support, the political will necessary to prosecute the war will inevitably wane, and the effort will be perceived as a failure from the start.

In addition to political will, American strategy relies on another essential feature of America's so-called Way of War.¹² In the context of Afghanistan, the United States remains the major player in the region, precisely because airpower allows it to project power through air lines of communication that cross over 7,000 miles into the South and Central Asian regions. Indeed, its ability to project and sustain power to any location on earth is unrivaled, and at the strategic level all but defines America's modern Way of War. To support

¹¹ Seth G. Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (2008): 7.

¹² See two sources: Weigley, *The American Way of War : A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*. and Boot, "The New American Way of War."

it, US military bases span the globe.¹³ The logic is drawn from geopolitical assessments of sea power, and indeed requires sea power as a coequal component for its global presence. In accordance with the finest Mahanian tradition, the United States possesses great naval capacity to control the sea lines of communication through presence and force, and when needed, to contest the air above the oceans and the ground from the sea.¹⁴ Furthermore, the US Navy moves the bulk of the vast resources required to supply distant armies. In parallel, airpower offers a similar capacity to supply distant armies, especially critical for those deployed within land-locked geographic locations. Though ground forces are vital to America's strategy in Afghanistan, those forces have zero staying power without comprehensive lines of communication to deliver massive quantities of necessary resources.

With all its unprecedented power, American strategy remains dependent upon other nations. Regional actors can shape behaviors and influence outcomes in Afghanistan by affecting lines of communication and by supporting local actors. Numerous reports describe actions by India, Russia, Iran, China, Pakistan, and others that affect Afghanistan. These reports indicate that the national interests of these countries factor significantly in whether or not the coalition can succeed against the Taliban insurgency. Their actions contribute either to the success or breakdown of the coalitions' strategy. Because America's ability to project power in Afghanistan depends upon these surrounding nations, the strategist must understand them.

In international relations, behaviors originate in competing interests. For example, Russia's concern about permanent presence of the United States in Central Asia resulted in pressure on the Kyrgyzstan government to close a key US base for air transport to Afghanistan. Other times, the domestic issues of regional actors can adversely affect America's ability to project power. Take for

¹³ Alexander Cooley, *Base Politics: Democratic Change and the U.S. Military Overseas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 4-5.

¹⁴ A. T. Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970). Mahan argues that the United States must have a powerful navy to become a great power.

instance the internal turmoil in Kyrgyzstan during April 2010. The collapse of the government caused interruption of flights at Manas air base—a key location along the coalition’s supply chain to Afghanistan. This interruption stalled the flow of thirteen thousand American troops into the war zone.¹⁵ The new Kyrgyz government must determine its policy regarding continued American use of this base through its own rational calculation in the context of competing Russian and US diplomatic efforts. This example is one of many as to how nation-state behaviors can influence American strategy in Afghanistan.

The previous discussion highlights an underappreciated problem for America’s best interests. Interconnection between regional diplomacy, power projection, and counter-insurgency is not well described for the Afghanistan war. The war in Afghanistan consists of a forty-six nation coalition and the Islamic State of Afghanistan against a group of non-state actors in a physical struggle for control. Diplomatic approaches begin with assessing the political interests of stakeholders in comparison to the United States’ interests. Other actors, such as the countries that surround Afghanistan, influence the dynamics of this contest in meaningful ways. China, Iran, Pakistan, and three former-Soviet states affect outcomes in Afghanistan. Additionally, Russia and India influence the behaviors of Afghanistan’s bordering neighbors. The extent to which these nations affect American strategy is a primary line of investigation in this thesis.

The stunning 2002 apparent victory in Afghanistan allowed military strategists to ignore the gradually changing perceptions of airpower value in theater. Success rarely encourages change, and so it was not until the resurgence of opposition power after 2005 that significant changes in military and regional operations were triggered. First, there was a shift in primary focus to a counter-insurgency strategy. To curtail the negative consequences and reduce the risk to the civilian population, General McChrystal issued a tactical directive that severely restricts the use of force—in particular

¹⁵Andrew E. Kramer and Michael Schwartz, "Kyrgyz Leader Gives Clinton Some Assurance on Use of Base," *New York Times*, April 13 2010.

airpower—in Afghanistan.¹⁶ Other activities demonstrate that the attention of airpower is focused on the security and military lines of operation. While useful in mitigating the negative perceptions and consequences of heavy-handed airpower use, this approach misses the positive strategic potential of airpower along governmental and economic lines of operation.

Unfortunately, airpower has been misunderstood and misapplied. America needs a public analysis that details what *responsible* airpower is in the context of Afghanistan. Such an analysis is the purpose of this thesis, in the hope that it will enable policy makers to better align airpower across the new military strategy. The analysis should further describe innovative ways to fold airpower into the complex counterinsurgency strategy in the short term. The treatment of airpower provokes several remaining questions. Why is airpower too often viewed as counterproductive in the context of Afghanistan counterinsurgency? In what ways could airpower be used differently to support governance, security, and economic conditions vital to success? The search for answers begins by drawing insights from patterns of regional behavior, contemporary and historical lessons about Afghanistan, and from the current and imaginative use of airpower.

Chapter 1 consists of a brief theoretical framework, and includes common terms and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 comprises a short historical survey of the balance-of-power dynamics of Great Britain and Russia and its relation to the emergence of Afghanistan as a nation state. These interactions reveal important observations about the timeless nature of international politics in the context of Afghanistan. In pursuing state interests, external powers attempted to dominate conditions inside Afghanistan. Using force, threats of force, and diplomacy, powers challenged each other for influence over Afghanistan's territory. By highlighting key wars, the survey reveals the evolution of Afghanistan's strategic value over time and provides observations about Afghanistan's human and geographic character.

¹⁶ General Stanley McChrystal, "Tactical Directive," (Kabul, Afghanistan: Headquarters International Security Assistance Force, 2009).

Chapter 3 expands the context through an analysis of the strategic interests of key regional actors, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and the United State within the context of Afghanistan. Not only do these interests shape the strategies of the states involved in Afghanistan, multiple competing political objectives influence the execution of those strategies. The inherent tension between stakeholders prevents and promotes cooperation depending upon state interests. Without an understanding of what motivates these key players, America's strategy may require more resources than it needs. Moreover, American airpower is a critical state capability that allows the United States to actively shape the regional balance of power.

Chapter 4 consists of an examination of airpower use in Afghanistan. Starting with the age of flight, the narrative highlights how Britain used airpower in its strategy to deal with challenges in Afghanistan and the Northwest Frontier Province between 1919 and 1947, the year India and Pakistan gained independence. This historical period provides a glimpse of how airpower on a small scale influenced the balance of power in the region as well as within Afghanistan. Next, the chapter culls from the Soviet Union's experience with airpower during its occupation of Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989. During this timeframe, the Soviets prosecuted an air war to support a failing government. Once its adversary could contest the air, the Soviets lost. Like previous nations, the United States attempted to achieve political objectives in Afghanistan using airpower. The historical experiences inform an assessment of the strategies for use of airpower that were considered by the Obama administration.

Chapter 5 discusses the *responsible* use of airpower in the context of Afghanistan. Given the influence of balance-of-power considerations in the region, and the importance of airpower in altering the perceptions of balance, this chapter explains what is being done and could be done to positively affect balance of power relations in the region. These include resurrecting civilian aviation, building Afghan state capacity to provide military airpower, and using the American and coalition capacity in a fashion that supports, rather than

degrades, stability. In addition to functional improvements in airpower, command and control could be enhanced by elevating the rank of the senior airman in USCENTCOM and delegating authority to the senior airman in country.

Terms

This paper covers wide-ranging historical, political, military, and technological concepts and ideas, so a common set of term definitions will help clarify the narrative and its underlying logic. US national security is the ability of national institutions to prevent adversaries from using force against American interests.¹⁷ The United States President should develop policy based on three types of national interests, namely vital, critical, and serious. Of these, vital interests require protection of the continental United States and concern survival of the nation.¹⁸ President Obama asserts that the war in Afghanistan is a vital interest.

For the purposes of this paper, the term actor refers to one of the following: nation state; insurgent group as the non-state actor; and the coalition. Political scientists define actor as the relevant organizational unit for analysis. Since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the predominant political unit has been the nation state. Each nation state possesses power that is comprised of military capabilities, cultural influence, economic might, and diplomatic capabilities. With rise in globalization, non-state actors have begun to wield capabilities commensurate with states. In the context of Afghanistan, non-state actors include the Taliban, Pashtun tribes, and al-Qaeda. An alliance aggregates the power contributions of members towards a common objective.¹⁹

¹⁷ Sam C. Sarkesian, John Allen Williams, and Stephen J. Cimbala, *Us National Security: Policymakers, Processes, and Politics*, 4th ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ A formal difference between an alliance and a coalition exists. An alliance is formed under certain conditions, such as a common threat, and lasts as long as members deem it beneficial. A coalition is formed for a specific purpose, such as to defeat the Axis Powers in WW II, for

Airpower means any use of the air medium to overcome the constraints of geography to project power.²⁰ Airpower manifests in several forms. Perhaps the most well known to adversaries in Afghanistan is the destructive form represented in bombers, fighters, and armed unmanned aerial systems. The destructive form has become predominant. This work seeks to reorient the public back on a more comprehensive understanding of airpower—one beyond destructive, kinetic action—to one that emphasizes non-kinetic power projection. This includes civil and military aviation along security, economic, and governance lines of operation.

Sources

This research effort benefited from a wide range of sources. To construct America's political objectives, primary sources included presidential papers, presidential speeches, and articles that described US policy. Interests, behaviors, and actions of regional actors were derived from the international press, think tank reports, and interviews of regional experts. Historical books and articles revealed patterns of regional behavior that helped explain contemporary actions. Valuable primary sources consist of war-time statements, digital video footage, and testimonies of key civilian and military leaders, to include interviews of general officers serving in Afghanistan, those who returned from the combat zone, and military personnel still engaged in the fight. Academic journals and secondary historical sources provided the foundation for analysis. Analysis has further drawn on ideas from theoretical works about balance of power theory, realism, irregular warfare, and airpower in small wars.

example, or to remove Sadaam Hussein from Kuwait as in Operation Desert Storm. When the objective is met, the coalition dissolves.

²⁰ Michael W. Kometer, *Command in Air War: Centralized Versus Decentralized Control of Combat Airpower* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air University Press, 2007).

Chapter 1

Theoretical Framework

Countries have no eternal friends, only eternal interests.

Unknown

This study is significant for several reasons. In the short run, it helps explain why Afghanistan is important to the United States and how airpower can help achieve a balance of power favorable to its interests. No claim is made to solve the many problems inherent in Coalition efforts in Afghanistan, though this study may help mitigate those problems while enhancing US and regional security. This includes resurrecting a body of historical information not widely thought about today that offers insights about the effectiveness of future force structure. In the long-term, the study fits directly into Secretary Gates' call for a balanced strategy "institutionalizing capabilities such as counterinsurgency and foreign military assistance."¹ The force America builds for Afghanistan will be relevant for future counterinsurgency operations and stability and reconstruction missions. Most importantly, airpower is vital to Afghanistan's future. Most importantly, airpower is vital to Afghanistan's future, and this study will provide lessons-learned and ideas that relate historical and theoretical concepts to contemporary thinking and actions..

Theoretical Framework & Limitations

Several theories underpin this thesis. Each delineates processes that happen simultaneously in the context of Afghanistan. External to the state, Balance of Power Theory describes the interaction of states as they order

¹ Robert M. Gates, "A Balanced Strategy: Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2009), <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20090101faessay88103/robert-m-gates/a-balanced-strategy>.

themselves within an anarchic environment.² Additionally, Kenneth Waltz's *second image argument* explains that what happens within the state influences foreign policy decisions of other states.³ Conversely, the reverse of this argument asserts that what happens externally to the state affects what happens within the state.⁴

Balance of Power Theory describes several phenomena in international relations. The theory posits that states join forces with other states to maintain their security and pursue their interests.⁵ When these alliances or coalitions form to promote their common interests, another group of states may fear that this development will disadvantage them. Therefore, these states form a counter-balance to compete for advantage.⁶

This paper is admittedly realist in its argument to describe international interactions in the context of Afghanistan. A structural realist assumes three things about the international environment. First, it is anarchic. This means there is no supra-government to dictate the actions of states. States structure their relationships amongst themselves according to no binding set of laws or rules. Instead, through an understanding of shared self-interests, states produce norms and standards of behavior that can be temporally enabling but are also malleable. Second, although all hierarchical organizations have an ordering principle described by specialization and subordination (lines of authority), in an anarchic international environment all states must provide for themselves the essential requirements for survival. Third, state power capabilities determine relationships in the structural order. America's air power capability, for example, is one component that enables it to exert influence in Afghanistan. Additionally, building airpower capacity in

² Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1st ed. (Boston, Mass.: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 119-23.

³ Kenneth Neal Waltz——, *Man, the State, and War : A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

⁴ Peter Goerevitch, "The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics," *International Organization* 32, no. 4 (1978).

⁵ Richard Little, *The Balance of Power in International Relations: Metaphors, Myths, and Models* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.

⁶ Ibid.

Afghanistan is critical for the United States' withdrawal from the region. Exploiting air power's capabilities will enable the Afghan central government to build connections to its local population as well as ensure its security.

Before venturing into detailed descriptions, it is important to acknowledge a limitation in any analysis of actors. Realists tend to treat actors as a black box with no need to investigate the internal workings of the state to understand behaviors. Due to the lack of transparency, either by lack of intelligence or state policy, the black box assumption may serve as the only available starting point for the strategist. However, one must acknowledge that alternative explanations exist.

In their study of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow argue that different explanations of state behaviors can co-exist, and then examine those behaviors from the perspective of three different models.⁷ Their Model I explanation assumes a single rational actor who commits to action based on a calculation of costs and benefits according to an internal value system. Through this lens, most actions trace to a rational worldview and can be rolled up into the unitary actor that is the state. In contrast, the Model II explanation assesses actions in light of organizational behavior within a state that may create outcomes that conflict with the intent or preferences of the central government. Finally, their Model III is used to examine the behaviors and interactions of individuals in the decision-making process. Some specific individuals wield more influence than others.⁸ Instructively, these three Models produce different causal explanations for an observable outcome. For example, United States decision-makers were initially perplexed with the apparent ease with which its U2 spy plane was able to obtain images of Soviet missile deployment locations in Cuba. Why should such an important event be so (relatively) easy to detect? Model I assessments suggested that the Soviets intended for the United States to see the missiles. A deeper look using

⁷ Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1999).

⁸ Ibid.

Model II revealed that institutional norms and procedures, specifically Soviet conventional military basing and construction practices, explain why the missiles were obvious. The Soviet's intent was not for the United States to see the missiles so early; rather it was a mistake revealed through an understanding of standard operating procedures.

Developing, changing, or executing strategy begins with understanding the ends that means and ways are implemented to achieve. The ends consist of the political objectives or policies that drive a nation's activity. These ends trace to motivations. Strategy begins with a simple question. *Why does a nation engage?* One generic answer derives from the classical realist Thucydides, who explained the reasons why Athens pursued its ends during the Peloponnesian wars.

The hierarchy of fear, honor, and interest is presented by Thucydides in the classic Greek form, where the middle case of three is accorded highest status.⁹ Machiavelli reiterated the hierarchy in Latin as fear, interest, and honor. Much like an individual who satisfies Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a nation attempts to satisfy its lower level needs such as survival before concerning itself with high order concerns.¹⁰ These same motivations apply to modern times. In the crudest form, a nation seeks to keep or maintain any power that it may have accrued as its most vital national interest. When the *fear* of losing power is overcome, the state has an *interest* in gaining more power. When its power needs are substantial, and its existence is not seriously threatened, the state seeks *honor* for its actions; it justifies what it does and expects others to see the correctness of its use of power. To fully comprehend the nuances of a situation, it is important to understand the motivations of the significant actors who are involved directly and indirectly in conflict.

⁹ Thucydides, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, ed. Robert B. Strassler and Richard Crawley (New York: Free Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Abraham H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychology Review* 50, no. 4 (1954). According to Abraham Maslow, an individual acts according to a prioritized hierarchy consisting of: first satisfying basic physiological needs, such as food and water; then safety; love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization.

In a contemporary framework, fear may manifest specifically in the form of the *security dilemma*. This phenomenon arises when, in response to an outside threat, a nation tries to improve its security by increasing its military capabilities. However, the nation may become less secure because such an increase in military power—even if motivated purely by defensive needs—may be perceived as a threat, in turn provoking an escalatory response from other nations.¹¹ Even though an absolute gain in power is achieved, the relative power of the state in comparison to its neighbors is diminished. The Cold War offers an excellent example. The Soviet Union and the United States both increased their nuclear capabilities in response to increases by the other. When one invested in newer technologies and expanded its arsenal, the other did so to counteract the new capabilities. The countermeasure became justification for the original increase, proof that the other state had designs on nuclear supremacy all along.

The dilemma can also arise from the physical presence of one nation in the sphere of influence of another. For example, the United States' invasion of Iraq and continued presence in the region may influence Iran's decision to pursue nuclear capabilities and to boost production of short range, conventional missiles. Examining the behaviors of the nations that surround Afghanistan can help determine if fear, the primary realist motive, is a key driver in their behaviors, and can assist the strategist in developing regional courses of action.

Honor may factor significantly into the calculus of a nation when it decides to act. Describing one form of honor, Robert Gilpin refers to prestige as the currency of power.¹² This construct manifests in behaviors geared at gaining or preserving global or regional influence. Having prestige enables a state to shape the behaviors of others in ways that help meet its interests. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States entered a space

¹¹ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 80.

¹² Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

race for pragmatic security reasons as well as for prestige reasons. For example, the United States strove for and reached the moon. America gained by impressing other nations around the world with its technological prowess, thereby attracting new agreements with other nations. Added prestige gave the United States a foundation to pursue partnerships with nations around the globe and institute international regimes that aligned with its interests.

Modern examples abound. For example, China may implement policies directed at gaining regional influence as suggested by its 2020 plan.¹³ Though its commercial presence in Africa, South America, and the Pacific tie to economic interests, these also trace to China's desire for greater global standing. Similarly, al Qaeda may base its actions upon religious ideology; the central group has expressed that defeating America in Iraq would elevate its world-wide prestige.

Interest further provides insight into an actor's behavior. Often the most compelling reason for state behavior consists of economic motivations. For example, Russia may assert its influence in Central Asia through political and economic deals that preclude the existence of oil and gas pipelines beyond its control.¹⁴ By doing so, Russia can maintain a monopoly on energy resources that flow from Central Asia to Western Europe and other places. China may engage in actions based on its interest to have access to vast global resources. Non-state actors, too, desire increased power and authority. The Taliban aspires to retake control of Afghanistan. The core leadership of al Qaeda wrote that creating a global caliphate is its primary interest.¹⁵ Understanding the ends may illuminate the possible ways and means by which a non-state actor will engage.

¹³ "China Sets 2020 Growth Goal," *China Daily* (17 May 2005), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-05/17/content_443098.htm.

¹⁴ Steven Woehrel, "Russian Energy Policy toward Neighboring Countries," (Congressional Research Service, 2008), 4-5.

¹⁵ Christopher M. Blanchard, "Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology," (Congressional Research Service, 2005), 7.

The analysis of actors' behaviors can be further bounded by identifying the behaviors most relevant to the type of war.¹⁶ The conflict in Afghanistan has the properties of an irregular war, namely a counter-insurgency campaign. Non-state actors, such as al Qaeda and the Taliban, can be categorized as insurgents that attempt to collapse the central government and reassert their power. They adopt guerrilla tactics similar to those employed by T. E. Lawrence during the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷ They do not comply with Western-established Geneva conventions. These organizations fight without uniforms, intermingle within the population, and attack outlawed targets. For example, Hezbollah co-located rocket launchers with Mosques, hospitals, and civilian communities in southern Lebanon in 2006.¹⁸ Insurgents in Afghanistan utilize psychological techniques that model insurgencies in history. Their use of madrassas to build an ideological base and to access a steady pool of recruits echoes Mao Tse Tung's emphasis on building up the political base for action.¹⁹

In irregular warfare, nations that surround a conflict country can play significant roles. They may intentionally or unintentionally provide sanctuary to insurgents. During the Vietnam War, the insurgent Viet Minh used areas in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand from which to stage attacks. In his review of seventeen insurgencies and aspects of thirty-six others, Dr Kaleb Sepp identified several best practices and worst practices in fighting insurgencies (see Figure 1).²⁰ *Denying or disrupting sanctuary* is a best practice in counterinsurgency. In the case of Pakistan, the Federally Administered Tribal Area has served as an obvious and important sanctuary for the Taliban and al

¹⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 88. "The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish . . . the kind of war on which they are embarking."

¹⁷ T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom, a Triumph* (Garden City, N.Y.,: Doubleday, Doran & company, inc., 1935).

¹⁸ William M. Arkin, *Divining Victory: Airpower in the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2007).

¹⁹ Zedong Mao, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, 1st ed., 5 vols. (Oxford; New York: Distributed throughout the world by Pergamon Press, 1961).

²⁰ Kaleb I. Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* (2006).

Qaeda.²¹ The following analysis will examine whether or not bordering nations provide sanctuary to the Taliban, how the sanctuary is used, and how the United States is responding. This analysis may reveal other sanctuaries that require attention. Airpower can play a significant role in sanctuary denial and shaping political conditions in sanctuary nations.

Figure 1: Successful and Unsuccessful Counterinsurgency Practices

Successful	Unsuccessful
• Emphasis on intelligence • Focus on population, their needs, and security • Secure areas established, expanded • Insurgents isolated from population (population control) • Single authority (charismatic/dynamic leader). • Effective, pervasive psychological operations (PSYOP) campaigns • Amnesty and rehabilitation for insurgents • Police in lead; military supporting • Police force expanded, diversified • Conventional military forces reoriented for counterinsurgency • Special Forces, advisers embedded with indigenous forces • Insurgent sanctuaries denied	• Primacy of military direction of counterinsurgency • Priority to “kill-capture” enemy, not on engaging population • Battalion-size operations as the norm. • Military units concentrated on large bases for protection • Special Forces focused on raiding. • Adviser effort a low priority in personnel assignment • Building, training indigenous army in image of U.S. Army • Peacetime government processes • Open borders, airspace, coastlines

Source: Sepp, Kalev I. “Best Practices in Counterinsurgency.” *Military Review* (2006): 8

In a counterinsurgency war, the degree to which an insurgency receives *outside support* may determine the victor. Bordering nations may facilitate or provide outside support to insurgents. History points to several examples where outside support proved decisive. During the Soviet-Afghanistan War (1979-1989), the United States provided significant financial and materiel support through Pakistan to the Mujahedeen insurgents to fight the Soviets. Specifically, the introduction of the man-portable Stinger missiles rendered Soviet airpower impotent. Stinger missiles raised costs to a point at which the Soviet Union could no longer afford to continue.²² Importantly, strategy must

²¹ Shuja Nawaz, *Fata--a Most Dangerous Place: Meeting the Challenge of Militancy and Terror in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS Press, 2009), 17.

²² O'Ballance, *Afghan Wars, 1839 -1992: What Britain Gave up and the Soviet Union Lost*.

also account for the possibility of an adversary's ability to contest the air and take measures to control the third dimension.

Bordering nations may lack the capability or the will to cut-off supplies that flow into the conflict country. With respect to Afghanistan, the ability to diminish outside support will depend upon regional diplomacy with the surrounding nations. Failing to cut off supplies may not be a matter of will, but rather a lack of capability to overcome certain conditions. For example, rugged geography may favor the insurgent, especially when it complicates attacks on the insurgents' lines of communication. The strategist cares about the source of this support as much as the mechanisms of support. Key questions include: 'Why does an outside sponsor support the insurgency?' and 'What kind of support and how does it occur?' Strategy should include ways to use airpower to monitor borders and expose outside support through signals intelligence, reconnaissance, and other means.

Airpower can contribute in accordance with many other counterinsurgency best practices. Commanders can use it to meet the needs of the population and the Afghan government. It has a role in intelligence and psychological operations. For example, using unmanned air vehicles, either directly or in concert with Special Forces, for detailed surveillance, reconnaissance, tracking and attack of insurgents and high ranking terrorists in remote sites and uncontrolled areas of both Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan shows an effective use of airpower in denying enemy sanctuaries, as well as providing strategic and tactical intelligence about insurgents. Aerial gunships, by precision targeting with negligible collateral damage to noncombatants, not only destroy insurgents, but have a deleterious psychological effect on surviving insurgents, while maintaining the security of local populations. The responsible use of airpower must factor in theoretical considerations, Afghanistan's unique history, and the balance of power in the region.

In summary, several theoretical constructs will guide the examination of history, contemporary regional actors, and historical use of airpower in the

context of Afghanistan. Balance-of-Power Theory explains how and why nation states compete for power. Counterinsurgency best and worst practices channel observation to specific state behaviors that can influence American strategy In the next chapter, the unique nature of Afghanistan is revealed from an historical analysis of balance-of-power behaviors in Afghanistan. A study of Britain, Russia, and Afghanistan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reveals patterns of interests, behaviors, and use of force.

Chapter 2

A Realist's Game—Balance of Power in Afghanistan

Instead of imposing our plan upon the world, we could rely on the potential inherent in the situation.

François Jullien

Carl von Clausewitz described conflict as a contest between two competing wills. Increasingly apparent in today's conflicts, the interests and wills of a great number of actors interrelate, though not all engage on the physical battle field. They influence the conflict by introducing money, materiel, and information. Through such contributions, state and non-state actors gain significant influence on the morale of the physical combatants. Contemporary Afghanistan is such a place in which several wills cooperate and compete in the pursuit of power. For example, The United States and its allies supply the government of Afghanistan with diplomatic support, training, funding, materiel, and armed forces to help eradicate the Taliban and Al Qaeda to bolster Afghan security and sovereignty. Conversely, Iran and other states supply men, materiel, money, arms, and sanctuary to the Taliban and Al Qaeda to help overturn the Afghan government and establish a radical Islamic state. The entwined wills of state and non state actors and combatants produce a complex pattern framing the context of conflict. Understanding the present conflict of wills, however, requires a deeper understanding of the past.

To better inform a contemporary analysis, a strategist must understand context. From the womb of context, strategy is born. Therefore, this chapter describes Afghanistan's strategic importance within an historical framework. Given its current potential to connect big world markets, a brief discussion addresses Afghanistan's historical relationship to economic trade. Historical narrative also reveals an Afghanistan caught within a regional balance of power moderated by two predominant states. The country's strategic value is also

revealed by the strategic choices made by regional powers during Afghanistan's early modern history. Key interactions between Russia and Great Britain negotiated a balance of power during eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that illuminated Afghanistan's unique nature. During this period, Afghanistan emerged for the first time as a nation-state with defined, yet ever evolving geopolitical borders.

A strategist must understand the forces that shape regional and internal balance of power given Afghanistan's unique nature. At the intra-state level of analysis, historical narrative informs the relationship between Afghan central authority and tribes in the state's capacity to wield power. It is vitally important to understand the conditions when Afghanistan's central authority was most effective and when the tribes have been most threatening. This is significant given the emphasis on governance objectives in the current strategy for Afghanistan.

Strategic Importance & Balance of Power

Situated at an historically strategic crossroads, Afghanistan has been fought over for millennia. The country sits within the Central Eurasian land mass that connects the continents of Europe and Asia, linking the Middle East, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. Approximately the size of Texas, Afghanistan links Iran, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. A number of reasons make this geostrategic position uniquely valuable to surrounding states. The strategic gateways to the Indian subcontinent pass through Afghanistan's Hindu Kush mountain range. In the Hindu Kush, a number of famed mountain passes served as key communication routes. Through the Khyber Pass, Alexander the Great, Tamerlane, Genghis Khan, and various Persian and Afghan forces descended upon India.

Afghanistan has five strategic cities. Historically, these urban centers existed on important trade routes. Mazie-a-Sharif sits north of the Hindu Kush on transit routes to Central Asia. On the east, Jalalabad exists on the border of Pakistan with roads that lead to the city of Peshawar in Pakistan. To the

west, the famed city of Herāt has always been situated on strategic trade routes on the gateway to Iran and the pathway to Turkmenistan. Numerous conquerors owned it. Genghis Kahn razed it to the ground leaving a wake of carnage. Persia made multiple successful and unsuccessful attempts to capture and hold the city. In the southwest, the city of Kandahar, originally build by Alexander the Great, sits on the communication routes to Pakistan, to Herat, and Kabul. Kabul contributed the same value, as it is importantly placed for commerce.

Afghanistan supplies a vast amount of water to the entire region. Snow melts from the mountains feed rivers that flow into surrounding nations. During periods of heavy drought, water rights have become a strategic concern for Afghanistan's neighbors. Historically, Afghanistan lacked the technology and capacity to use more of its own water for agriculture. Beyond geography, invasion routes, and water resource, the strategic value of the country has varied in other ways.

Important trade routes have always passed through Afghanistan. Afghanistan's modern condition is tied to its relationship to one of the most famous trade routes in history through Central Asia. At one time, significant overland trade occurred through Central Asia along what is known as the Silk Road (see Figure 2). This 2,800 mile transcontinental pathway consisted of a few major roads and a web of smaller roads that connected Russian, Middle Eastern, and Chinese markets through Central Eurasia.¹ Silk, silver, pottery, and commodities passed along this road. The route generated, for its time, the largest international market on the globe. The southern Silk Road route passed through Afghanistan's territory, just north of the Hindu Kush, connecting to smaller roads that fanned out to major Afghan cities.

The economic vibrancy drove significant changes to societies and cultures along this route. Throughout Central Asia, big, politically important cities emerged along the opulent path. The road brought forth an influx of

¹ K. Krist Herst, "Along the Silk Road: Connecting West and East in Prehistory," <http://archaeology.about.com/cs/asia/a/silkroad.htm>. (Accessed 10 May 2010).

different people, ideas, technology, and cultural exchange. Trade flourished along the route until the mid-nineteenth century when the Silk Road dwindled to nothing. The demise of this road profoundly affected Central Asia and Afghanistan. The story is worth reviewing, because of the context that it creates for Afghanistan.

Figure 2: Silk Roads



Source: *The Silk Road and Arab Sea Routes* <http://people.hofstra.edu/geotrans/eng/ch2en/conc2en/silkroad.html>. Used with Permission.

Conventional explanations for this decline usually start with the rise of major sea routes for trade. During the 1500s and 1600s, European powers established economic centers along the coasts of the Asian Littoral Zone, thereby drawing trade away from the Central Asian land route. Littoral European nations, such as Great Britain, France, Spain, Denmark, and Portugal established port locations at will along the Asian and Middle Eastern coastlines. This was possible because sea power provided a comparative advantage for European states to control the traditional sea routes along the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. Powerful naval capabilities provided Western Europe with the means to control sea lines of communication, project

power into Asia, and drive economics.² Without question, naval capabilities transformed Great Britain into the dominant maritime super power of the age. Because of this instrument, Britain's East India Company established a small foothold on the Western coast of the Indian subcontinent. The economy on the India subcontinent boomed, but trade no longer needed to move by land.

In general, sea capabilities enabled massive economic and social transformation of the Asian littorals. As a result, major movements of goods to and from Europe, Asia Minor, and Southeast Asia flowed via oceanic trade routes versus having to pass by land through Central Asia. Likewise, Russia and China developed their own coastal access points allowing them to take advantage of sea trade. The preponderance of trade no longer needed to move via the Silk Road.³ But sea routes had co-existed well before the eventual demise of the Silk Road. In fact, these routes served as a useful auxiliary Asian Littoral System, comprised of sea routes and ports, which complemented the land routes.⁴ The rise of sea routes was a necessary, but not sufficient reason for the death of the trade route. The other blow to the Silk Road occurred on land.

In concert with the rise of the maritime trade routes, expansion of the Russian empire and westward expansion of China contributed to the elimination of the Silk Road. Between 1689 and 1759, power shifts in Central Asia destroyed the political, cultural, and social structures that maintained the Silk Road. As Central Asian power declined, Russia and China became more powerful. Having suffered numerous invasions by nomads of the Central Asian

² Alfred Thayer Mahan proposed a similar argument for the United States to build and develop a powerful Navy. Similarly, Gen Billy Mitchell and Giulio Douhet provide arguments for the creation of air capabilities and their important contributions. See: A. T. Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1897; reprint, 1970). See: William Mitchell, *Winged Defense : The Development and Possibilities of Modern Air Power--Economic and Military* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2009). See: Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, trans. Dino Ferrari (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama, 1942). Similarly, Gen Billy Mitchell and Giulio Douhet provide arguments for the creation of air capabilities and their important contributions.

³ Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 232.

⁴ Ibid. The entire paragraph summarizes the argument made by Beckwith about why the economic collapse of Central Asia happened.

steppe, China designed to crush out the last semblance of power in eastern Central Asia. During the 1750s, China defeated Junghars who had promoted trade along the Silk Road in East Turkestan. Likewise, Russia defeated the last remnants of the Western Mongols and occupied western Central Asia. In result, China and Russia altered fundamentally and irreversibly changed the regional balance by destroying the societies that propped up the Silk Road. Consequently, Central Asia no longer had the infrastructure and social organization to maintain the trade route. Trade between Russia and China became bilateral leaving out Central Asia. These factors combined with a significant alternative to overland trade drove the Silk Road into oblivion.

Through the 1800s, Great Britain continued to expand into North India and Persia reinforced its position along Afghanistan's western border. As the four regional powers converged and stabilized, the entire Central Asian geographic area, including Afghanistan, once valued as the strategic crossroads for trade, was effectively sealed off from the world. Consequently, Central Asia plummeted into one of the longest economic depressions in history with major consequences for the people of the region, especially for Afghanistan.⁵ The exchange of ideas ended. Poverty struck. Hardship persisted. The entire region, including Afghanistan seems to have been preserved in a time capsule. By the early 1700's the expansion of Russia and Great Britain, and the stabilization of Persia and China, constricted the area down to one final unconquered country—Afghanistan.

Rise of an Afghan State

Before the time great powers interacted with Afghanistan, a window of time existed when the seeds of an Afghan nation-state sprouted. Instead of nation-states, smaller political units engaged in balance of power dynamics. During this time, the relative power of Afghanistan influenced the strategic calculation of its neighbors.

⁵ Ibid., 262.

Regional states had reason to fear the relative power of Afghanistan. Relying on the country's geography, the people of Afghanistan rejected foreign attempts to subjugate them completely. The mountain tribes have never really been conquered. During every foreign intervention since Alexander the Great, these tribes have brewed rebellion. The connection of an indigenous central authority to the tribes has been a major determinant of Afghanistan's power vis-à-vis its neighbors.

An indigenous central authority in Afghanistan is a relatively new phenomenon. Central governments in Afghanistan have varied in type and success. The most successful indigenous Afghan organization arose in the eighteenth century amidst a decline of the Persian and Mongolian Empires through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶ In this period, conditions favored the rise of two powerful Afghan clans called the Abdalis and the Ghilzais. Both have shaped the Afghan political landscape for centuries. The first Afghan central authority would emerge from the Sedozai family within the Abdalis clan. The Sedozai's had a solid relationship with the Persian royal court that gave resources to form a strong political entity within Afghanistan. When central authority improved, Afghanistan's power increased, thereby giving it a place to shape the regional balance of power. This was the only time an Afghan central authority acted from a position of relative strength as compared to other regional players.

Between 1747 and 1772, the Great Durrani Empire emerged as a formidable Afghan power.⁷ Several elements make this unique. It appears to be the only time a loosely confederated group of tribes chose a central leader.⁸ They picked Ahmad Shah Abdali, a body guard of an assassinated Persian King

⁶ W. K. Fraser-Tytler, *Afghanistan: A Study of Political Developments in Central Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 61-69.

⁷ Prior to the Durrani Empire, Pashtuns of the Ghilzai tribe rebelled against Persian occupiers in Kandahar and invaded Persia. Between 1709 -1738, this group became known as the Hotaki dynasty which ruled Persia until 1929. In 1738, Ahmad Shah Durrani led forces that defeated the last Hotaki ruler.

⁸ In an address in London, ex-Pakistani President Musharraf explained the significance of this historical fact. He emphasized the importance of understanding how this occurred.

and an Afghan tribal chieftain, to become the new King of Afghanistan.⁹ The Afghan tribal leaders made their decision according to the most important means of collective decision-making –the Loya Jirga. This process united all the Pashtun tribes. With a solid political foundation, King Ahmad Shah Durrani consolidated the country’s capabilities and transformed Afghanistan into a regional power.

The new Afghan political unit possessed higher relative power than its neighbors. From 1747 to 1762, the Afghans repelled Persian occupation of Heart and Kandahar and invaded the Indian subcontinent several times.¹⁰ To fight the Sikhs of India, the Ahmad Shah Durrani ordered Jihad that united the Afghan tribes in a common cause. Marshalling tribal forces, the Ahmad Shah Durrani beat the Sikhs in the Indian subcontinent.¹¹ Afghan incursions went as far as the capital city of Delhi. Riches from India and Persia piled into Afghanistan. The conquests expanded the country’s borders. By 1772, Afghanistan had reached the height of its relative power (see Figure 3). For the first time, an indigenous leader forged the necessary relationships with the Afghan people to become a major regional actor.

Figure 3: Height of the Afghan Kingdom



Source: <http://www.afghanland.com/history/map1772.jpg>
[PERMISSION PENDING]

⁹ The King replaced Abdahli with Durrani to become King Ahmad Shah Durrani.

¹⁰ *Afghanistan a Country Study*, ed. Richard Nystrop and Donald Seekins (Washington: Library of Congress, 1986), 13,14.

¹¹ Several Afghan rulers used Jihad as a mechanism to bond the tribes to a central authority. By using Jihad to create common purpose, a central authority transformed the tribes into strategic weapon. Alternatively, Jihad has also been used against the central government.

In the context of regional balance, Afghanistan's rise depended upon several factors. At the intra-state level of analysis, the legitimacy of central authority was a key requirement. Ahmad Shah gained legitimacy from the inception of his reign. Major domestic political groups, namely most of the Afghan tribal chiefs, participated in the decision to elect him. The decision was made according to well established inter-tribal norms and rules, specifically the Loya Jirga. Second, the central authority forged a solid relationship with the tribes. The King established a common purpose. Early state formation relied upon war-making and conquest.¹² The ruler relied on a well-represented council of tribal chiefs to make decisions and raise an army comprised of tribal militias when needed.¹³ For invasions into India against strong opponents, Ahmad Shad used *Jihad*-a call for holy war to consolidate disparate ethnic, Muslim tribes within Afghanistan and India into a formidable force.¹⁴ Central authority bonded militia-like tribal forces into a capable military-like force for the purposes of the state.

The Afghan Empire also had greater relative power as compared to its neighbors. To the West, Persia suffered from civil war that was prompted by the assassination of Persia's leader Nadir Shah in 1747. Internal issues weakened Persia's capabilities making it vulnerable to Durrani's advance. To the North, China and Russia had weakened the kingdoms of the Central Asian steppe as each consolidated their power. To the South, Durrani's forces proved more powerful than the Sikhs. These external conditions permitted the Afghan's to expand. However, internal factors and the external environment changed again during the latter part of the eighteenth century. The Afghan Empire proved short-lived.

¹² Christopher Cramer and Jonathan Goodhand, *Try Again, Fail Again, Fail Better? War, the State, and the 'Post-Conflict' Challenge in Afghanistan*, ed. Jennifer Milliken, State Failure, Collapse, & Reconstruction (2003), 138.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Meredith Runion, *The History of Modern Afghanistan*, The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), 70. Jihad is defined as "holy war waged on behalf of Islam as a religious duty; also: a personal struggle in devotion to Islam especially involving spiritual discipline." Source: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Jihad>

Beginning with Ahmad's Shah's death in 1773, the power of Afghanistan steadily declined over the next fifty years. Successors feuded over domestic control. As result, chunks of the Durrani Empire were lost. For example, the Durrani's lost a sizeable piece of territory in what is today's Pakistan northwest region when Indian Sikhs rebelled. Without strong, unified central authority, Ahmad Shah's successors could not retain land. Between 1816 and 1826, different Durrani leaders carved the remaining central state into smaller, less powerful sections.¹⁵ Central authority diminished. The connection between central authority and the tribes loosened. As this strong political state fragmented, its capabilities were divided.

Structural realists argue that the distribution of capabilities among states will determine the order of those states in an anarchic system. That is exactly what happened. As internal strife weakened the Durrani Empire, several peripheral powers had become stronger. Exploiting the internal conditions, smaller powers exploited Afghanistan's weakened domestic situation and nibbled away land. The Sikhs and other groups seized back territory from the Afghans. The balance of power equation changed as two greater powers ebbed closer to the land of the Hindu Kush.

Buffer Territory in the Balance

Converging around Afghanistan, the British and Russian empires pursued policies to expand or protect their interests through the application of diplomacy, force, and the threat of force. These Balance of Power interactions changed the geopolitical landscape by affecting the shape of Afghanistan's borders.

Empires used Afghanistan to separate each other. Additionally, surrounding states attempted to shape conditions inside Afghanistan. Methods involved use of force to take land. Or, they used diplomacy at

¹⁵ Cynthia Smith, "A Selection of Historical Maps of Afghanistan," Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/pub/afghanistan.html>.

influencing the internal policies of Afghanistan favorable to themselves and against their adversaries. Each wanted conditions inside Afghanistan to favor their individual interests. At times, regional powers attempted forays into Afghanistan with the hope of gaining continued advantage through a strategy of diplomacy, positioning forces-in-being inside or proximal to Afghanistan, or brute force.¹⁶

By the mid-1800s, Afghanistan sat squarely between the Russian and British Empires. Given this strategic position, great powers recognized that whoever had greater influence in Afghanistan could protect their holdings and threaten advance into other strategic regions while preventing the movement of other actors. By the late nineteenth century, the shift in the balance of power was utterly complete. The situation relegated Afghanistan to a land-locked, buffer state. Each power attempted to use Afghanistan to gain advantages, create disadvantages for opponents, or maintain the status quo. British foreign policy attempted to maintain a status quo in their favor. From the end of the Second Anglo-Afghan War in 1842 until 1919, the British paid annual subsidies to the Afghan government for the sole right to represent Afghanistan in all its external foreign policy matters.¹⁷ One scholar summarized how Britain attempted several policy approaches.

Its history in the nineteenth century would seem to point clearly to the conclusion that neither a policy of *masterly inactivity*, such as that of Lords Mayo and Northbrook, nor one of *aggression*, such as that of Lords Auckland and Lytton, is likely to meet with success. The policy of a strong and united Afghanistan, independent but bound by the closest ties of interest to the British, which possesses elements of both the other policies but leans definitely to neither, has been the most successful in the past and will probably remain so in the future. Having therefore determined at the outset with all the British Governments of the last twenty years that the

¹⁶ Everett C. Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age*, Cass Series--Strategy and History; (London ; New York: Frank Cass, 2005). Dolman describes strategy as the bridge that links means to ends for the purposes of attaining continual advantage. For the British, all actions were focused on continued protection of the Indian subcontinent.

¹⁷ Fraser-Tytler, *Afghanistan: A Study of Political Developments in Central Asia*, 178.

maintenance of the *status quo* is, on the whole, the best possible course both for India and Afghanistan...¹⁸

Basically, the purpose of British policy was to prevent Russia from threatening India by securing a foothold in Afghanistan.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Russian Empire expanded its territory into Central Asia. In the early 1700s, Peter the Great “commissioned his heirs to possess India and Constantinople as the keys to world domination.”¹⁹ Several Russian leaders discussed invasion of British India. Twice, Napoleon conspired with Russian Tsars to plan joint invasions of British India through Afghanistan.²⁰ The Franco-Russian dialogue never translated into a joint action. However, Russian Tsar Paul I documented his intent to send a force to India unilaterally, thereby substantiating British fears about Russia’s intentions.²¹

The Indian subcontinent appealed to Russia because of its immense wealth-generating capacity, its access to warm water ports, and as a means to pressure Great Britain. At maximum, Russia hoped to wrest control of India away from the British. As Russia acquired the Central Asian Kingdoms via conquest, Russia desired Afghanistan as a land buffer to prevent the British from menacing their possessions. At minimum, Russian intentions were to create a buffer state between the British colony and their Central Asia territories.

Throughout the centuries, Great Britain understood Russian and French designs on India, as well as the strategic importance of Afghanistan. Britain viewed Afghanistan as critical to securing and maintaining economic interests

¹⁸ Sir Frank Noyce, *England, India, and Afghanistan: An Essay Upon the Relations Past, Present, and Future between Afghanistan and the British Empire in India* (London: CJ Clay & Sons, 1902).

¹⁹ "Great Game Timeline: From the *the Great Game* and *Setting the East Ablaze* by Peter Hopkirk," <http://www.oxuscom.com/greatgame.htm>.

²⁰ Alexis Krausse, *Russia in Asia: A Record and a Study* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1900), 149.

²¹ Andrei Lobanov-Rostovsky, *Russia and Asia* (New York,: The Macmillan company, 1933), 101-02.

in the Middle East and India.²² Its policy aimed to keep Afghanistan within the Empire's sphere of influence. Without formal agreements outlining rules, an anarchic international system created an ambiguous environment. Each actor judged the other in terms of intentions and capabilities. Fear stemmed from Russia's encroachment in Central Asia and from a perception about Russian influence in Afghanistan. This fear provoked Great Britain into two failed interventions in Afghanistan.

The first Afghan War (1839-1842) occurred because Britain feared an aggressive policy by Russia towards British interests in Afghanistan. Adversarial designs on Afghanistan threatened British supremacy in India. With encouragement from Russia, Persia attacked the city of Herat in 1834 and again in 1837 with the objective of permanent occupation.

State behaviors signaled a decline in Britain's relative influence over Afghanistan in relation to Russia's. During the conflict, Persia rejected British diplomatic calls to end the siege. In 1838, the visit of a Russian envoy to Kabul doubled British fears about competition over Afghanistan. The Afghan ruler, Dost Mohamed, had conversed with Russian envoys about military assistance with Persia. Mohamed had rejected British proposals to negotiate a solution about territorial disputes over Peshawar.²³ Mohamed requested British military help to offset the Indian Sikh menace that threatened his southern flank. British leaders perceived Dost Mohamed's willingness to deal alone with the Russians as a threat. The potential shift in the balance of power threatened India as well as challenged British control in the region.

To address its security problem, Britain used a compellence strategy with the Persians and brute force with the Afghans. Compellence involves "initiating an action that can become harmless only if an opponent responds."²⁴ Britain parked a small fleet of Royal Navy warships off the southern coast of Persia to

²² Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946*. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1969).

²³ Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *The Anglo-Afghan Wars 1839-1919* (Osprey Publishing, 2009), 16.

²⁴ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 72.

compel a decision to end the siege.²⁵ Before the British force marched to Afghanistan, the Afghans of Herat repelled a nine month Persian siege. With Russian pressure, the Persians withdrew.²⁶ However, the British leader Lord Auckland decided to use force anyway to remove Dost Mohamed's government from power. His objective was to replace the Afghan leader with a deposed Afghan King who would support British interests.²⁷ From 1838-1840, it appeared the British force succeeded. Dost Mohamed fled and lived in exile. Deposed King Shah Shuja returned to the throne. The British gained an agreement to represent Afghanistan in external foreign policy matters. Most British forces withdrew leaving behind the Army of the Indus, a small force to assist the central government maintain control. Additionally, the Afghans, especially the tribes, received subsidies from the British crown.

British behavior and actions in 1840 reversed this apparent success by violating tribal and Islamic norms. During that year, the small garrison outside Kabul received a steady flow of Afghan women into the camp where the Army of the Indus was stationed. Additionally, the British reduced the financial subsidy, thereby breaking a negotiated promise. In result, the central authority could no longer assuage the tribes. The tribes attacked the foreign presence. When it was clear they had the advantage, the tribes' will to fight became total. The tribes also rose up against the central government, killing the newly installed King, and forced the British army to abandon the garrison.

The consequence of violating tribal and Islamic norms proved horrific. The tribes hacked, shot, and ambushed Britain's Army of the Indus from Kabul through snowy mountain passes. Only one soldier of over 15,000 that began

²⁵ J. B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf. 1795-1880* (Oxford,: Clarendon P., 1968).

²⁶ It is debatable whether it was the Royal Navy parked off the coast of Persia or the realization that it could not win Herat that drove Persia's decision to end its siege. If the former, the use of gunboat diplomacy is an example of Schelling's compellence. In this case, a rational actor applied the threat of force in order to get an adversary to halt an action by calculating the costs and benefits of continuing an action.

²⁷ Several good histories are available to describe the actual events of the Afghan Wars at several levels of analysis. See H. W. Carless Davis, *The Great Game in Asia (1800-1844)* (London,: Pub. for the British Academy by H. Milford, 1927).

the retreat survived.²⁸ Likewise, the tribes attacked a British outpost in Jalalabad, on the Western side of the Khyber Pass. In response, the British sent an army back into Afghanistan to avenge the wrong. The army burned two cities in retribution and killed responsible parties, then withdrew.²⁹ Defeat by the Afghan's blotted an otherwise spectacular British record of battles around its Empire. In result, military accomplishments were reversed and Amir Dost Mohamed returned to power in Afghanistan. However, the Afghan central authority adopted isolationist policies by attempting not to favor either the British or the Russians.

The Anglo-Afghan War of 1878-1881 originated from similar conditions as the first. With a sizeable Russian military presence on the Afghan border, Russia sent an uninvited diplomatic mission to Kabul in 1878.³⁰ Britain viewed this presence through the lens of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, when Russia again demonstrated its aggressive tendencies by fighting a war with the Ottoman Turks. From a position of strength Russia tried to exact harsh terms from the Turks using heavy-handed diplomacy.³¹ As balance of power theory suggests, Great Britain and others balanced against the more powerful Russia to get them to back down. Relations were under heavy strain because a Russian diplomatic mission violated the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1873, which designated Afghanistan within Britain's sphere of influence and defined the Russian-Afghan border.³² Furthermore, it appeared that the Afghan ruler Sher Ali had accepted a situation unfavorable to British interests. Though Russia recalled the mission, Britain decided to use force to permanently alter conditions in Afghanistan.

In 1878, Britain invaded Afghanistan with a better equipped, bigger force. Breech-loading rifles introduced a technological advantage over the Afghan tribesmen. Learning lessons from the first war, the British changed

²⁸ Fremont-Barnes, *The Anglo-Afghan Wars 1839-1919*, Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946.*, 101.

²⁹ Fremont-Barnes, *The Anglo-Afghan Wars 1839-1919*, 36.

³⁰ O'Ballance, *Afghan Wars, 1839-1992 : What Britain Gave up and the Soviet Union Lost*, 36.

³¹ Fremont-Barnes, *The Anglo-Afghan Wars 1839-1919*, 51.

³² Angus Hamilton, *Afghanistan* (London: William Heineman, 1906), 406.

their tactics to include sending forces behind the positions of Afghan militias and attacking from three directions. The British occupied Jalalabad, Kandahar, and Ghazni. The Afghan Amir fled the country. In 1879, his replacement asked to negotiate terms. In result, the British agreed to provide a subsidy in exchange for control of the Kyber pass, the right to influence all matters of Afghanistan's foreign policy, and permission to keep forces in Afghanistan. Stability dissipated rapidly, however, because of issues with the tribes.

Despite a successful invasion, occupation proved too difficult. The tribes rose against the British throughout the entire theater of operations. Over the course of two years, thousands to tens of thousands rallied against foreign presence and attacked British positions. Similar to the first war, issues with the subsidy caused consternation. Tribal leaders perceived that the British controlled the purse rather than the central authority. Lack of timely payment aggravated tribal leaders. Furthermore, the call for Jihad obligated tribal members to unify against the British. Like the first war, the British used reprisal to punish the population. In one case, British authorities hung perpetrators and destroyed a bazaar.³³ Instead of gaining compliance, these actions further incited the tribes. Passions manifested in persistent, widespread attacks in all cities against British positions. Despite winning most of the battles, the British realized that long-term presence in the country was futile.³⁴

Great Britain's failures point to a repeatable pattern inherent to conflict in Afghanistan. When invaders were especially brutal, violated the tenets of Islam or reneged on financial deals, the loose confederation of tribes united to attack them. Britain's actions reflected the practices of its colonial doctrine. Their system called for the payment of subsidy to foreign government in exchange for favorable policy. By reducing the subsidy, the British lost favor

³³ Fremont-Barnes, *The Anglo-Afghan Wars 1839-1919*, 66-7.

³⁴ Though several texts provide detailed histories of the battles, Gregory Fremont-Barnes provides a concise history.

with the tribes. By engaging in practices that offended tribal sensibilities, the British force became a foreign antibody that must be rejected. The system called for violent reprisals to punish and subjugate indigenous peoples when they were not compliant. Though strategies of force generally worked throughout its empire, it failed in Afghanistan as a solution for permanent peace. Using the strategic advantage of geography, these tribes could engage in attrition warfare against better equipped and trained imperial forces. These two wars educated the British on better plans for Afghanistan.

The regional, if not international, political environment drove Britain to interfere with the domestic politics of Afghanistan. The nation attempted to compel Afghanistan's central government to adopt policies favorable to Britain's primary security interest. Their modus operandi mixed primarily force and finance to achieve political ends. Force succeeded initially, but attempts to keep a force-in-being within Afghanistan failed. In both cases, the implementation of subsidy created issues. Reducing the amount broke a commitment to the tribal powers. The British learned that the best way to achieve their interests was to rely on an Afghan central authority and minimize its own physical presence inside the country. With respect to the second Afghan War, the government concluded that no affordable military solution existed. Only a political solution resolved the crisis.

The solution showed up like a gift basket in 1880 when Abdur Rahman returned from exile in Russia to claim dominion over Afghanistan. The British seized the opportunity to negotiate with Rahman about an assumption of power. In line with its interests to divide power within the buffer state, the British refused the Amir's request to place Kandahar under his authority, instead allowing another tribal chief to retain power there.³⁵ To gain the approval of Britain, the Amir honored previous agreements. In exchange for money and military supplies, he permitted the British to manage Afghanistan's foreign policy. The parties agreed. In 1880, the installation of Abdur Rahman

³⁵ Sultan Mahomed Khan, *The Life of Abdur Rahman, Amir of Afghanistan* ed. Mir Munshi (London: John Murray, 1900).

set conditions for complete evacuation of British forces from Afghanistan with the exception of Kandahar. After solidifying these arrangements, Abdhul Rahman steadily brought order to a chaotic country.

During his rule from 1880-1901, Abdhul Rahman Khan created a strong central government backed by standing army that was sufficient enough to stabilize the country. As a descendant of Dost Mohamed, the Amir possessed a foundation of legitimacy. Enough of the population did not view him as a puppet of a foreign power. In public, he purposefully distanced himself from the British, never appearing too close. His first actions included: re-establishing a central treasury, building a national army, and expanding a human intelligence network.³⁶ He developed vital political arrangements with tribal chieftains and provincial warlords. Like Ahmad Shah Durrani, the Amir also used religion to unify the country by invoking an existential threat posed by foreign infidels.³⁷ By increasing the power of the central authority, the Afghan ruler quelled over twenty-six tribal rebellions during his twenty-one year rule. When tribes resisted his demands, the Amir subjugated them by force and exiled their leaders. Rahman conformed to the framework required by British Empires that managed Afghanistan's foreign policy. By doing so, the Amir diminished external security threats that enabled him to focus primarily on domestic issues.

Britain learned that it could not absorb Afghanistan, and Russia could not accept the cost by making an attempt, so both relegated Afghanistan to a buffer territory. The British sought to keep Afghanistan strong enough to manage its own internal affairs and to deter the Russians from engaging in their sphere of influence. The British maintained a role in keeping Afghanistan strong by supplying money and arms to the central authority. As Afghanistan became more internally stable, the two regional powers engaged in a series of

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946.*, 130-34.

bilateral diplomatic engagements to further stabilize the region, through which Afghanistan emerged as a recognized nation-state.

From Buffer Territory to Buffer State

To address security interests, Russia, Britain, and Afghanistan, made a number of joint decisions aimed at stabilizing the region. The objective was to preserve the interests of the two empires. The most important decisions focused on defining Afghanistan's boundaries (see Figure 4.) During 1885-1893, several Russian and British commissions did exactly that. In 1885, the two empires delineated a permanent border for Afghanistan's northern frontier along the Amu Darya River.³⁸ Russia retained some disputed territory, which it seized by force, while conceding other land back to Afghanistan's control. The agreement provided protection to Russia's Central Asian acquisitions and established a line that Russia should not cross. Amir Abdur Rhaman, ruler of Afghanistan, considered these boundary decisions crucial to the

Figure 4: Evolution of Afghanistan's Borders



Source: <http://www.afghanland.com/history/map1880.jpg>.

[PERMISSION PENDING]

³⁸ *Afghanistan: A Country Study*, ed. Peter R. Blood (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2001).

protection of his nation and for stability. The Afghan ruler believed Russia had been and remained the greatest threat. He wrote: “the boundary line of Afghanistan was fixed, and, thank God! Since that time up to the present day, I have been relieved of perpetual quarrels and disputes about North-Western frontier, and up to this day there is peace.”³⁹

Regarding the Southern border, the Afghan Amir needed a way for the British to respect his territorial rights. After learning about a British proposal to build a railroad from India to Kandahar whether he wanted it or not, the Amir conspired to prevent it. In general, Abdur Rahman feared that railroads would enable foreigners to exploit his country, especially during a time when Afghanistan lacked sufficient military power.⁴⁰ He said the British plan to build a railroad line into his country was “just like pushing a knife into my vitals.”⁴¹

Without a recognized southern border, risk existed for unilateral action by a state, via military or economic means, against Afghanistan’s interests. A defined sovereign border would constrain the British. At the prompting of the Afghan ruler, a British commission proposed the Durand line as Afghanistan’s southern border with British India, now Pakistan.⁴² In 1893, the British and Afghan governments signed an agreement rectifying the southern border. This border runs through rugged mountainous terrain, right through the Pashtun population, which today numbers 42 million people.⁴³ Though today this line complicates counterinsurgency efforts, the original purpose was to enhance sovereignty by limiting nation-state action.

In 1895, another joint commission extended Afghanistan’s territorial integrity all the way to the Hindu Kush mountain pass to China. This 100 mile

³⁹ Khan, *The Life of Abdur Rahman, Amir of Afghanistan* 154.

⁴⁰ Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946.*, 152.

⁴¹ Khan, *The Life of Abdur Rahman, Amir of Afghanistan* 159.

⁴² Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946.*, 158.

⁴³ Historically, neither the central government of Afghanistan nor Pakistan controls the region on either side of the Durrand line. Dominion resides with the tribes.

long sliver of land, called the Wakhan corridor, completed the land buffer separating British and Russian spheres of interests.⁴⁴ The intent was to transfer responsibility for the Wakhan corridor to the Afghans. Per agreement, Afghanistan incorporated the sliver into its sovereign. However, the Amir recognized the distance between his capital and this land acquisition, and so arranged it as a British protectorate.

With the border issues resolved, the two empires entered a period of increasingly cooperative diplomatic engagements, about Afghanistan, as well as other issues. Cooperation hit a high point during the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. The convention covered a comprehensive set of Anglo-Russian foreign policy issues about Afghanistan, Tibet, and Persia. The powers directly communicated in a comprehensive manner. In many cases, the parties put down in writing, for the first time, their interests, commitments, and procedures to resolve disputes.⁴⁵ Representatives of the British King and the Russian Tsar formalized agreements about Afghanistan, and both parties achieved mutually beneficial results.⁴⁶ For instance, Afghanistan remained in Britain's sphere of influence and Russia agreed to use Britain as the intermediary for all relations with the government of Afghanistan. In the spirit of new cooperation, the agreement's preamble expresses the intent "to assure the perfect security" of the frontiers of both empires in Central Asia.⁴⁷ The convention also removed ambiguity that can be characteristic of anarchic systems.

As the two empires fully expanded in Central Asia, each had to interpret the intentions of the other based on observations and diplomatic overtures. This environment fostered misperceptions and sometimes resulted in war. Britain had major interests to protect: sea lines of communication and colonies. Russia's interests and actions competed with these interests. In

⁴⁴ *Afghanistan: A Country Study*.

⁴⁵ Rogers Platt Churchill, *The Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907* (Cedar Rapids, Ia.,: The Torch press, 1939).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 305.

absence of knowing full intentions, the empires assumed the worst of the other. Prior to the convention, the parties addressed issues narrowly rather than within a global context or used various strategies of force. After the convention, many fundamental fears dispersed. For instance, the written record committed Russia to keeping Afghanistan outside its sphere of influence. The commitment bound them to not send political agents to Afghanistan, an important distinction since the two Anglo-Afghan Wars started because of Russian envoys in Kabul. Such new rules diminished British fears about Russia's intentions regarding its vital interests.

The convention reflected a fundamental transition in power relationships. In essence it established a regional regime with a system of rules to govern state interactions. In an anarchic international system, however, rules only impose a *degree of order* on these interactions rather than complete control.⁴⁸ For example, the Convention of 1907 established rules governing interactions over economic trade, political influence, and military endeavors. During the years of imperial expansion, the interactions occurred in an environment with a higher degree of anarchy.

The degree of anarchy reduced further when Afghanistan's borders solidified. The borders signified a transition from an anarchic, ill-defined rule set to something closer to an international regime guided by the principles of the Peace of Westphalia (1648). This standard acknowledges the right of a state to self-determination. In this spirit, the Convention of 1907 indicates that "Great Britain did not intend to change the political status of Afghanistan."⁴⁹ The Convention of 1907 transformed Afghanistan into a nation-state and ended an era of hostile competition between two of the world's greatest empires. Thus, Britain and Russia shelved the Great Game.

⁴⁸ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 27-29.

⁴⁹ Churchill, *The Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907*, 305.

Conclusion

Afghanistan territory continues to be at the strategic crossroads of Central Asia. Given the strategic position, great powers recognized that whoever had greater influence in Afghanistan could protect their holdings and advance their movement into strategic locations while preventing the movement of others. Each power attempted to use Afghanistan to either gain advantage or maintain the status quo. These balance of power dynamics persisted for centuries and are based predominantly on the geostrategic position of Afghanistan. Historically, access to trade routes and a position as a buffer state constituted Afghanistan's strategic value.

Big power interventions in Afghanistan exemplify realist notions about why states act. The regional, if not international, political environment drove Britain, predominantly, and Russia to interfere with the internal order of Afghanistan. Fear and interest motivated Britain in the nineteenth century. For Britain, the protection of India—"the brightest jewel of the British crown"—was the predominate consideration.⁵⁰

To protect India, British strategy pursued some level of control over Afghanistan given its close proximity. Britain attempted to compel Afghanistan's central government to adopt policies favorable to Britain's primary security interest. Their modus operandi mixed primarily force and finance to achieve political ends. Force succeeded initially, but attempts to keep a force-in-being within Afghanistan failed in a spectacular manner. In both cases, the implementation of a subsidy created issues. Reducing the subsidy broke a commitment to the tribal powers. The British sought to keep Afghanistan strong enough to manage its internal affairs while maintaining a diplomatic arrangement to deter the Russians from engaging in their sphere of influence. Britain's overall strategy, therefore, required significant influence in Afghanistan

⁵⁰ Ibid., 5.

When Russia contested that influence, it generated fear in Britain. The fear was not unfounded. In Central Asia, the bear's territorial expansion encroached on India as it closed in on Afghanistan. Numerous Russian actions placed British interests at risk. Diplomatic presence in Kabul impinged on Britain's sphere of influence. Russia had encouraged Persia to attack Herat. Aggressive Russian behavior in the Caucasus alarmed western powers. To the British, the presence of large Russian military forces in Central Asia also challenged their supremacy in India.⁵¹ Furthermore Russia used fear to bait Britain. It sent a diplomatic mission to Kabul in retaliation for Britain's diplomatic and military pressure during the end of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. Britain took the bait and engaged in two costly wars.

Through history, competing states wanted an Afghanistan that benefited their own interests. To achieve it, they either sliced into the land to create a buffer zone or attempted to prop up a government that favored their national interests. If one state had begun to benefit, the others attempted to undercut or manipulate the internal character of Afghanistan. The external balance of power rippled into Afghanistan's internal balance.

Afghanistan also had a role in the external balance of power. When Afghanistan had a stable central government and its relative power was significant, it adopted expansionist policies. In the presence of great powers, Afghanistan adopted isolationist policies to protect itself. These policies were based on relative capabilities, namely military capacity, between Afghanistan and the outside states. Furthermore, central authorities adopted a strategic defensive strategy based on impregnable mountain geography and an historic force of nature—the tribes. Indeed, the tribes appear to be one constant in Afghanistan's history that determines success or failure of a foreign presence, and the success or failure of the central authority.

The survey also reveals interesting historical patterns about success or failure of an Afghan central authority. Classically, the two primary actors in

⁵¹ Ibid.

Afghanistan consist of an Afghan central government and the tribes. Afghanistan was strongest when the central authority held sway over the tribes. Though Afghanistan has many different clans and tribes, it is possible to generalize these into one category as a necessary political element in Afghanistan's internal balance of power.

The relationship between these two actors often determines the level of stability resident in the country. When the central authority and the tribes are united, the collective has been successful as in the case of Ahmad Shah Durrani. When these entities are in tension, the central government remains weak and lapses into intrigue and in-fighting, as in the period immediately after Ahmad Shah Durrani. When the central authority possesses strong military capacity and adheres to behaviors consistent with Islamic principles and tribal values, then a central government has been strong, as in the case of Abdur Raham. In general, Jihad was a useful way to unify the tribes against a threat. The stronger rulers had the credibility, or legitimacy, to apply Jihad. Jihad, like any powerful idea, propels mass social movements in action.

Based on these findings, a strategist should align some instruments of national power to basic historical patterns. Airpower can be used to strengthen the bonds between the Afghan central authority and the tribes. To do so, airpower must become a significant capability for use by the Afghan central authority for domestic security, governance, and economic conditions. At the same time, airpower must not create pretext for expanded Jihad. On this last point, a strategist must identify a way to re-focus Jihad away from foreign presence and towards something else more in line with Afghan, Pakistan, and US interests. If there's a way for the Afghan central authority to harness Jihad under these conditions, then it should be pursued. History shows how important it can be to the success of the central authority.

Understanding the interests of states is vital to strategy. To protect or achieve interests; states make decisions based on their perceptions of others' behaviors. During the nineteenth century, Russia, Britain, Afghanistan, and others existed in a relatively higher level of anarchy. Afghanistan did not have

defined geopolitical borders. Diplomatic exchanges were not formal. Forums for cooperative discussion did not exist. The degree of anarchy decreased when Afghanistan's borders were defined and when Russia and Britain concluded the Convention of 1907. The transition from a highly competitive environment to a cooperative one depends upon diplomatic engagement.

Though the names and types of surrounding powers changed, Afghanistan's strategic value within balance of power interactions persisted through the twentieth century. Some regional powers viewed Afghanistan as a classic buffer state to separate themselves from competing powers. Others approved of a strong Afghanistan along as it posed no threat. Some regional actors used Afghanistan to balance out the actions of others. To make Afghanistan more useful, some states intervened to change its politics or to degrade or enhance its military capacity.

Military theorist Sun Tzu suggested that one should know thyself and one's adversary.⁵² Given the factors that shape Afghanistan, the meaning of those words expands to know these plus the bordering nations. The assessment begins with America's strategic interests.

⁵² Sun Tzu, *The Illustrated Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 125.

Chapter 3

Contemporary Strategic Interests

*One ignorant of the plans of neighboring states cannot
prepare alliances in good time.*

Sun Tzu

*Instead of imposing our plan upon the world, we could rely
on the potential inherent in the situation.*

François Jullien

The historical record describing British and Russian interaction with regard to Afghanistan is typical of the many conflicts that have occurred there over millennia, and is particularly valuable when discussing the current situation. History provides lessons that strategists fail to learn at their peril. To analyze and develop strategy properly, it is also fundamentally necessary to understand the interests and interactions of the actors involved in today's conflict. As with those in history, today's external and internal actors contribute to both the regional and internal balance of power. The strategist must account not only for patterns of interaction across time, but also for Afghanistan's unique nature when attempting to reach strategic goals.

An assessment of contemporary actors helps to reveal an inherent potential about the environment that a strategist can harness. Instead of forcing an ideal upon the world, the potential energy of the situation can be exploited to gain an advantage.¹ Such an holistic approach informs the development of courses of action, including elements of cooperation, coercion, and force to help resolve the conflict.

¹ François Jullien, *A Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 16.

Contemporary Analysis

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, changed the political landscape of Afghanistan. With the world's implicit approval, the United States and Afghan opposition groups toppled the Taliban regime and began an extended process of stabilizing the new government and uniting the country's politically fractured tribes. With tangible support of a broad base of non-fighting nation-state partners, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the US-led NATO coalition continue a war against a resilient insurgency. Complicating matters, non-governmental organizations have proliferated within Afghanistan while regional states work to influence the operating environment. The challenge is to identify which actors are most important.

The following brief synopsis narrows the range of actors to the most influential regional nation-states, summarizes their strategic interests, and examines how their behaviors shape outcomes in contemporary Afghanistan.² Key regional actors include all the states that surround Afghanistan, plus two very influential states proximal to the region. These are: China, Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, India, and Russia respectively. Figure 5 provides a map of the analysis area.

² As described in the theoretical framework, the assumption herein is that actions, statements by leaders, and behaviors reflect the intentions of the state as a unitary rational actor. A rational actor makes cost-benefit calculations according to an internal value system. Furthermore, the research assumes realist motivations by states.

Figure 5: Regional Map



Source: <http://socsci.gulfcoast.edu/geo1010lk/afghanmap.gif>

The United States

Interests and Force Methodologies

Why does America remain involved in Afghanistan? As the nation expends greater levels of blood and treasure, the need for an answer grows. It heightens when time passes without evidence of favorable resolution. When discussing the United States' policy for Afghanistan, Americans debate whether security, prestige, regional influence, or economics compel sustained engagement.³ Their representatives in Congress seek answers to determine whether they will vote to continue authorizing resources for the war. Experts debate whether any strategy the United States applies will positively affect the outcome and whether America can afford the cost.⁴ Others cite historical evidence of the Greeks, the Persians, the British, and the Soviet Union to

³ Nathaniel C. Fick et al., "Tell Me Why We're There: Enduring Interests in Afghanistan (and Pakistan)," (Center for a New American Society, 2009). See also: Lee Hudson Teslik, Updated: March 11, 2008,, "Backgrounder: Iraq, Afghanistan, and the U.S. Economy," *Council on Foreign Relations* (2008), <http://www.cfr.org/publication/15404>.

⁴ For example against, see: Andrew Bacevich, "Afghanistan Surge Is Not Worth the Cost in Blood and Treasure," *U.S. News & World Report*, no. Saturday (2009), <http://www.usnews.com/articles/opinion/2009/02/23/afghanistan-surge-is-not-worth-the-cost-in-blood-and-treasure.html>. See also: Lindsay Hodges Anderson, "Debate on Afghanistan Strategy Continues among Hks Experts," Harvard Kennedy School of Government, <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/news-events/news/articles/forum-afghanistan-strategy-dec09>

reinforce a narrative that no great power has ever succeeded in Afghanistan.⁵ They suggest that a complex tribal coalition steeped in guerrilla warfare will inevitably win and the surge of troops in Afghanistan is futile.⁶ Those assertions challenge the military strategy—or the approach—to shaping an Afghanistan in the best interests of the United States. They also challenge the existence of the threat and the capability of that threat to harm America.

In strategy, political objectives or the end state conditions are vital when considering the application of force or other resources. In the United States, the President sets policy and Congress authorizes and appropriates resources. The latest encapsulation of American policy towards Afghanistan is discerned in President Barack Obama's speech at West Point during December 2009.

The speech described the threat, national goals, and a strategy to achieve them. First, the President asserted that "US security was at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan."⁷ These locations were described as the "epicenter of violent extremism practiced by Al Qaida" and the place where the September 11, 2001 attacks were planned.⁸ He cited recent arrests, inside the United States, of individuals trained in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region who intended to commit terrorist acts on US soil. Furthermore, the President warned that Al Qaeda and other extremists were pursuing nuclear weapons.⁹ To the extent that the latter is true, fears for survival based on the intent and behaviors of non-state actors resident in and around Afghanistan raise US interests in the region to the highest level.

The president further identified a national goal "to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaida in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to prevent its capacity to

⁵ For an example, see: Malou Innocent and Ted Galen Carpenter, "Escaping The 'Graveyard of Empires': A Strategy to Exit Afghanistan," CATO Institute, http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=10533. See also: Stephen Tanner, "Indomitable Afghanistan," *Military History* 26, no. 3 (2009). See also: "'Graveyard of Empires'," *CQ Researcher* 19, no. 28 (2009).

⁶ For an example, see Stewart Rory, "Where Less Is More," *New York Times* 2007. And, see: Anonymous, "Obama's Faltering War; Afghanistan and Pakistan," *The Economist* 393, no. 8653 (2009).

⁷ Obama, "Remarks at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

threaten America and our allies in the future.”¹⁰ The President explained a strategy that aims to:

- Deny Al Qaida a safe haven
- Reverse the Taliban’s momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the Government
- Strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan’s security forces
- Strengthen the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to take the lead
- Strengthen Pakistan’s capacity to target groups that threaten the United States and Pakistan¹¹

The policy prescribes actions to prevent the re-emergence of Al Qaeda safe havens in Afghanistan and to defeat them in Pakistan. President Obama linked the Taliban insurgency directly to Al Qaeda’s ability to re-establish itself, and called Afghanistan and Pakistan the places where ideological inspiration can flourish.¹² The American strategy is, essentially, a counterinsurgency. Recommendations about airpower’s responsible use will treat these political objectives and the strategy as givens. Before doing so, the strategist must understand American interests, past strategies to achieve those interests, and American resolve.

How Did the United States Get There?

That is the situation today, but the United States’ interest in the land-locked country was based, only a few decades ago, on its potential to block the expansion of the Soviet Union. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and established a puppet communist state ruled from Afghanistan and empowered by Soviet military force. United States policy during the Carter and Reagan administrations was to use Afghanistan as a public relations exemplar

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. The specific quote reads “We will strengthen Pakistan’s capacity to target those groups that threaten our countries.” The author interprets this to mean the United States and Pakistan.

¹² Ibid.

in the ideological battles of the Cold War. Every year on the anniversary of the invasion, both Presidents called for the Soviets to end their occupation and expressed support for the Afghan people.

Support was not always rhetorical, however. Toward the latter part of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, for example, President Reagan met personally with the Afghan Resistance. These overt displays paralleled growing covert US support through Pakistan to mujahedeen fighters. As part of a successful policy of containment, in which Soviet expansions into peripheral areas around the world were checked by American support to opposition governments and insurgencies, the US supplied arms and financial support to guerrilla groups fighting the puppet government in Afghanistan.¹³ The most significant support came with the insertion of man-portable FIM-92 Stinger missiles that effectively negated the Soviet airpower advantage.¹⁴ Stripped of assured air support and mobility, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan crumbled.

After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, America's interest in Afghanistan subsided. Annual support for an Afghanistan policy dried up, especially funding to Pakistan who had been a US ally against the Soviets. Instead, the United States provided minimal financial aid as part of United Nations humanitarian efforts.¹⁵ The change in United States policy left Pakistan on its own. This history informs the strategic calculus of many of the regional actors today who think the United States will eventually leave. America shifted its policy after meeting its own interests.

While America looked elsewhere, Afghanistan transformed from a useful proxy to a serious security threat. Soon after Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan descended into chaos as a civil war erupted. By 1998, the Taliban gained control of significant portions of Afghanistan, and terrorist training camps

¹³ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ O'Ballance, *Afghan Wars, 1839 -1992: What Britain Gave up and the Soviet Union Lost*.

¹⁵ The fundamentals of this regional game are the same as when Great Britain and Russia challenged each other during the 1800s.

began to emerge.¹⁶ No longer a Cold War battlefield Afghanistan had become a safe haven for organizations to train individuals in terrorist tactics, promote extremist Islamic ideologies, and generate plans to harm Western interests.

By 1998, a growing terrorist threat from Afghanistan was clear. Organizations in Afghanistan were linked to terrorist attacks against US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that killed twelve Americans and three hundred citizens of the African countries, and injured five thousand.¹⁷ The United States opted to use force against terrorist organizations resident in the Afghanistan sanctuary. In 1998, President Clinton ordered missile strikes against “terrorist-related facilities in Afghanistan and Sudan, because of the imminent threat” posed to United States national security.¹⁸ The United States objectives were to destroy training camps, administer punishment, and deter future attacks.

President Clinton clearly articulated goals, very similar to today’s objectives: “Let our actions today send this message loud and clear; there are no expendable Americans; there will be no sanctuary for terrorists; we will defend our people, our interests, and our values.”¹⁹ By 1999, the United States directly held the Taliban responsible for making Afghanistan a safe haven for Al Qaeda. In July 1999, President Clinton issued an executive order imposing economic sanctions against the Afghan Taliban for support of Al Qaeda.²⁰

However, missile strikes and sanctions did not eliminate or deter the threat emanating from Afghanistan. The terrorist sanctuary continued to enable terrorist planning for more attacks. In 2000, Al Qaida plotted and carried out an attack against the US Navy destroyer *USS Cole*, killing 17 sailors

¹⁶ William J. Clinton, "Statement on the National Emergency with Respect to the Taliban," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 35, no. 27 (1999).

¹⁷ ———, "Address to the Nation on Military Action against Terrorist Sites in Afghanistan and Sudan," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 34, no. 34 (1998).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Clinton, "Statement on the National Emergency with Respect to the Taliban." Note: The United States also influenced the United Nations Security Council to established the Al-Qaida and Taliban Sanctions Committee on 15 October 1999 to oversee UN sanctions directed by security resolution 1267 dated 1999.

and injuring 40 others.²¹ Clearly undeterred and supported by the Taliban, Al-Qaeda continued to plan against United States military and economic interests.

America's interest level in Afghanistan reached a crescendo as a result of the September 11th attacks against the Pentagon, the World Trade Centers, and Flight 93. Again, Afghanistan under the Taliban continued to be a safe haven for Al-Qaeda. To address the security threat, the United State's first objectives were "to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime."²² Instead of missile strikes, the United States turned to airpower, seapower, special operations, and US intelligence agents to augment the indigenous Northern Alliance to rout the Taliban. During the two month successive chase and destruction of the Taliban, airpower provided kinetic strike by AC-130 gunships engagements; B-2, B-52, and B-1 bomber strikes; maritime kinetic strikes by F-18s and F-14s launched from carrier decks and supported by USAF air refueling; and massive airlift into a landlocked country.²³ To meet objectives, the United States relied upon precision weapons and its ability to project power using air and sea forces. However, military force did not beat the Taliban by itself.

During Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, the United States used military power in concert with other significant means to enable its intervention in Afghanistan. America engaged in coercive diplomacy with Pakistan to get them to drop their support for the Taliban and make their country and airspace available to support military operations.²⁴ In exchange, the President waived a number of sanctions against Pakistan that had been in place prior to

²¹ "Al Qaeda Associates Charged in Attack on USS Cole, Attempted Attack on Another U.S. Naval Vessel " Department of Justice, http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2003/May/03_crm_298.htm.

²² W. Bush George, "Address to the Nation Announcing Strikes against Al Qaida Training Camps and Taliban Military Installations in Afghanistan," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 37, no. 41 (2001).

²³ Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Airpower against Terror: American's Conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom* (Santa Monica: RAND National Defense Institute, 2005), 248-49.

²⁴ For a summary of sanctions, see C. Christine Fair, *The Counterterror Coalitions: Cooperation with Pakistan and India* (Santa Monica: The RAND Corporation, 2004), 11-12.

9/11 and committed \$1 billion in aid to Pakistan.²⁵ Furthermore, the United States spent millions of dollars inside Afghanistan to buy-off warlords, tribal members, and other people who might resist. The US Central Intelligence Agency had a budget of \$1 billion to gain commitments from Afghan groups not to fight.²⁶ These and other actions are examples of how the United States used diplomatic engagement, money, and force to meet its interests. Though these actions disrupted the sanctuary, the United States sought a longer term solution.

After the initial military success, the United States' objectives for Afghanistan remained denial of sanctuary for terrorist groups. However, the focus of means shifted from regime change and degradation of Taliban military capabilities to emphasis on counter-terrorism against Al-Qaeda. The prevailing assumption was that a light footprint of United States ground forces with supporting airpower and seapower could support the emergence of a new Afghan central government while pursuing Al Qaeda.²⁷ Concomitant to this low cost assumption, the United States diverted its attention from Afghanistan to Iraq, setting conditions for a Taliban insurgency to arise.²⁸ Because of the light footprint approach, the Taliban was able to reestablish itself in Afghanistan and foment an insurgency.²⁹ Whereas the Bush administration

²⁵ George W. Bush and Pervez Musharraf, "Remarks Following Discussions with President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan and an Exchange with Reporters in New York City," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 37, no. 46 (2001).

²⁶ See Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos : The Us and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Viking, 2008), 97. Ahmed Rashid has written several books about Afghanistan and is a well know Pakistani journalist who has done exhaustive research about the Taliban, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

²⁷ Seth G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009).

²⁸ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The US and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*. See also: Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad."

²⁹ See Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 133. Chapter 7 titled "Light Footprint" explains the argument. The United States did not have the force, in type and size, to maintain its strategic objectives. The United States wanted to keep its footprint low so as to not have the same footprint as the Soviets during their occupation of Afghanistan.

diverted America's attention and resources from Afghanistan to Iraq, the Obama administration returned the weight of effort from Iraq to Afghanistan.³⁰

By 2009, fresh approaches to the long-standing security threats were under consideration during President Obama's administration. Like Presidents Clinton and Bush did, President Obama identified the same vital security interest, to make sure that Afghanistan did not become, again, a sanctuary for terrorist groups. However, President Obama's strategy to meet those ends differed from his predecessors. During the spring of 2009, Secretary Gates signaled a major shift in US strategy by replacing the top military leader running the war in Afghanistan with a career Special-Forces Officer, General Stanley McChrystal.³¹ General McChrystal officially assessed the challenge in Afghanistan as an insurgency and in his initial assessment proposed a counterinsurgency approach.³²

During fall 2009, the executive branch engaged in strategic debate, weighing the recommendations of a few schools of thought about strategy in Afghanistan, culminating in a decision for a surge in troops.³³ General McChrystal proposed an increase in the number of American ground forces and a change to the military approach—less conventional and more counterinsurgency-focused. Rather than increase ground forces, Vice President Biden argued for an increase in Predator airstrikes and a focus on building Afghanistan's military and law enforcement capacity.³⁴ After careful review and advice, President Obama decided on a course of action and ordered

³⁰ President Bush's decision to surge troops into Iraq and a change in the military strategy there produced favorable results by the time President Obama was elected. The shift from Iraq back to Afghanistan was easier since Iraq had stabilized.

³¹Note: The decision to assign General McChrystal to command aligns well with a successful counterinsurgency practice. The practice is to assign a charismatic, dynamic leader as the single authority to lead. See: Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency."

³² Stanley McChrystal, "Commander's Initial Assessment," (NATO International Security Assistance Force and US Forces Afghanistan, 2009).

³³ Peter Baker, "How Obama Came to Plan for the 'Surge' in Afghanistan," *New York Times* 6 December 2009. Also, see: Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002). Cohen asserts that Presidents need to engage in strategic debate with their generals by asking the tough questions.

³⁴ Wilson Scott and E. Kornblut Anne, "White House Eyeing Narrower War Effort; Top Officials Challenge General's Assessment," *The Washington Post* 2009, A.1.

US military commanders to execute a new plan. On December 1, 2009, in a televised address, President Obama explained the reasons why the war in Afghanistan is in the United States' security interests. He described a new United States military strategy for the region that emphasized counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and counter-terrorism in Pakistan. The strategy called for 30,000 additional troops in Afghanistan, bringing America's total commitment to 100,000 troops. The President gave his civilian-military team 18 months to make progress in Afghanistan before the first withdrawal of American forces begins in July 2011.

Implications

The fundamental reason that the United States engages in Afghanistan is the same as in 1998. There is a belief, well-informed by history and recent intelligence, that Afghanistan and areas in Pakistan will continue to pose a security threat to the United States. When the Taliban governed, Afghanistan provided sanctuary to terrorists. In the ungoverned Pakistan Northwest Frontier, the Taliban and Al Qaeda continue to plan attacks against Afghanistan's people, Afghanistan's central government, and Pakistan's government. Recently, the United States has arrested more individuals bent on attacking America's homeland.³⁵ Based on history and recent experience, if the United States departs without fundamentally changing the internal political structure, then Afghanistan may become a sanctuary again, and threats to US security will continue to exist in Pakistan. When December 2010 nears, the President, the Congress, and the public will debate the progress in Afghanistan and decide whether to stay the course or try a new approach. Now the longest war in America's history, the Afghan conflict poses interesting lessons and implications about the effectiveness of force.³⁶

³⁵ Miller Greg, "Man Claims He Aided Times Square Suspect; Arrest in Pakistan Evidence Shows Taliban Was Involved in Failed Bomb Plot," *The Washington Post*.

³⁶ As of May 2010, Afghanistan has lasted longer than Vietnam by 1 month.

The United States used different types and scales of force to alter the landscape inside Afghanistan to the advantage of the United States. With each successive Presidential administration, the underlying security interest remained the same, but the strategy changed. National goals were consistently to deny sanctuary in Afghanistan for terrorist groups; however, the scale and mechanism of force differed. In 1998, missile strikes into the heart of Afghanistan did not end the sanctuary. The purpose was to destroy the capacity of terrorists to train and plan, and to deter them. In 1999, sanctions against the Taliban had no perceptible effect. In 2001, airpower removed the Taliban from government and chased al-Qaida into hiding, but sanctuaries remained in Pakistan near the Afghan border region. In 2010, a big land force supported by airpower and seapower wages a counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and supports a whole-of-government approach which applies a broad spectrum of national power in Afghanistan.

Under the Obama administration, the purpose of America's military force is to create time and space to build Afghan government capacity to meet America's pragmatic security goals. Military force also complements a comprehensive civilian strategy aimed at economic, political, and security objectives. According to Secretary Robert Gates, "This goal cannot be completed on its own, but must be accompanied by political, economic, and diplomatic efforts outlined" in the State Department's regional stabilization plan. No doubt that the cost of the new strategy is likely greater than previous administrations. To cover the cost of the latest Afghanistan surge, the United States will spend \$30 billion in FY10.³⁷ In total, the United States will spend \$105 billion in FY10 to cover the cost of the Afghanistan war.³⁸ Now the longest American War in history, Afghanistan continues to test America's resolve.

³⁷ Obama, "Remarks at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York."

³⁸ Richard Wolf, "Afghan War Now Outpaces Iraq Costs," *USA TODAY*, A.1.

In a democracy, the strength of the nation's willpower may determine success or failure.³⁹ When examining the relative power between opponents, Sun Tzu predicts the victor by examination of moral influence and four other factors. *Moral influence* is "that which causes the people to be in harmony with their leaders."⁴⁰ In modern parlance, this resembles *political will* or political support for war. Despite nine years of combat, the political will of the United States remains strong. After the domestic attacks on United States' soil in 2001, Congress overwhelmingly voted to support war. The House of Representatives and the Senate voted 420-1 and 98-0 respectively in favor of authorizing the use of military force.⁴¹ Since then, both the Bush and Obama administrations relied on congressional supplemental funding to pay the costs of the war in Afghanistan.⁴² On March 10, 2010, the House voted 356-to-65 against a resolution to the end the war in Afghanistan within thirty days.⁴³ On May 27, 2010, the US Senate voted 80-18 against a proposal to require the President to specify a timetable for the full withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.⁴⁴ These votes showed widespread support for the administration's strategy. Presidential policies, congressional votes, and rhetoric provide an indication of America's staying power. Furthermore, America's commitment significantly influences regional players.

³⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 77. Clausewitz writes: "if you want to overcome your enemy you must match your effort against his power of resistance." He expresses power of resistance as "the product of two inseparable factors *the total means at his disposal* and *the strength of his will*." Clearly, the Coalitions financial resources and technology exceed the Taliban. But the Taliban have the means of population and a resilient will.

⁴⁰ Tzu, *The Illustrated Art of War*, 92. Five factors include moral influence, weather, terrain, command, and doctrine.

⁴¹ Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists (Pub.L. 107-40, 115 Stat. 224, enacted September 18, 2001), House Joint Resolution 64 and Senate Joint Resolution 23

⁴² Pat Towell, Stephen Daggett, and Amy Belasco, *Defense Authorization and Appropriation* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2008), 108.

⁴³ Bendavid Naftali, "Test to Democratic Agenda Comes from within; Afghanistan Vote Lets House Democrats Air Broader Discontent with White House on Health Care, Environment and Other Issues," *Wall Street Journal (Online)*. See also: H. Con. Res. 248 (H. Res. 1146).— Directing the President, pursuant to section 5(c) of the War Powers Resolution, to remove the United States Armed Forces from Afghanistan. Referred to Foreign Affairs Mar. 4, 2010. Failed passage Mar. 10, 2010; Roll No. 98: 65–356.

⁴⁴ "Senate Rejects Exit Timetable for Afghanistan," Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE64Q4PB20100527>.

America's military and diplomatic power creates conditions for this cooperation to occur. While the United States remains present in the region, the regional actors appear to cooperate on common interests—curbing the flow of narcotics, neutralizing destabilizing entities like Al Qaida, and setting conditions to change Central Asia through economics. This cooperation is evidenced by tangible actions, such as large scale reconstruction projects and development of Afghanistan's industry.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan: Interests and Analysis

Afghanistan is at a crossroads in history with a fresh chance at becoming a modern state. Though the path taken depends upon many variables, significant internal factors and external factors affect the choices of human political and social organizations. A modern nation cannot be realized without a secure, stable central authority in Afghanistan that also has legitimate ties with a loose confederation of tribes. A stable central government is vital to America's current strategy in Afghanistan.

After the removal of the Taliban government in 2001, a strong central government received a kick start at the Bonn conference. At the conference, Afghan elites, influential members of the Northern Alliance, and others selected Hamid Karzai as the interim leader. Karzai is the elder of a prestigious Pashtun tribe and experienced fighting firsthand during the opening phases of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. The tribal connection and his warrior-ethos provide an important connection to Afghanistan's people. After two elections, Karzai continues to serve as head of state. The latest encapsulation of Afghanistan's interests is found in President Karzai's inaugural address.⁴⁵ The President outlined the following key areas:

- Peace and Reconciliation

⁴⁵ Ahmed Karzai, "Un-Official Translation of the Inaugural Speech by H.E. Hamid Karzai President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, http://www.president.gov.af/Contents/72/Documents/960/President_Karzai_s_Inaugural_Speech_Nov.pdf.

- Security
- Good Governance
- Economic Development
- Regional Cooperation
- Foreign Policy Affairs

Afghanistan's interest includes but spans beyond America's narrowly focused interest in dismantling Al Qaeda in the region. However by helping Afghanistan accomplish its interests, the United States can meet its own interests. The speech provides insight that can later be used to recommend proper use of airpower.

An important Afghan policy is to pursue a strategy of reconciliation, rather concentrating on killing or capturing its enemies. The first approach is a proven successful counterinsurgency practice, while the second is a proven way to fail in a counterinsurgency (See Figure 1 in Chapter 1). This entails measures to allow adversarial individuals and groups back into the country and in society as long as those people are willing to embrace the new constitution and behave peacefully. This classic win-without-fighting approach may carve off members of the Taliban or adversarial tribes depending upon the strength of their convictions. Airpower can provide information operations capabilities in line with this policy objective. For instance, leaflet drop or broadcasts could serve as the counter to the Taliban's night letters which instill fear in the population.

President Karzai's words about security have implications for the proper use of force, and airpower specifically. The speech affirms a national objective that the central government should possess the monopoly on force in Afghanistan. Efforts to expand the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police force are in line with that objective. Furthermore, President Karzai stated: "Civilian casualties continue to remain an issue of concern to the people and government of Afghanistan. I am pleased to see that our continuing discussions with NATO and ISAF, and our joint operational measures, have resulted in a considerable reduction in the number of civilian casualties. We

would like to expand and enhance such measures, so that casualties among our civilian population to be avoided [*sic*].”⁴⁶ These statements align well with the historically important observation that force’s efficacy has limits in Afghanistan. Often, foreign use of force has rallied tribes rather than coerced them. The most effective use of force will be the force wielded by the central authority rather than by the Coalition. Sensibly constraining force, especially airpower, helps comply with this policy objective.

The governance objective is vital to the security of the state. Governance assures international support, but more importantly enhances the internal power balance within Afghanistan. History revealed an internal phenomenon vital to securing Afghanistan: the relationship between the central government, arguably the head of state, and the tribes is essential. Legitimacy of the ruler, elected or otherwise, depends upon the utilization of existing political organizing structures unique to Afghanistan. Decision-making that involves the Loya Jirga enhances legitimacy. Moreover, the government cannot appear as a puppet of a foreign power, and the central authority must not lose its appeal to Islamic-oriented tribes by seeming too western.

Several important factors can erode the legitimacy of the central government of Afghanistan. International criticism of the last election compelled the United States to pressure the Karzai government for greater reforms, a pressure Karzai has publicly rejected. Senator John Kerry travelled to Afghanistan to meet with President Karzai after the most recent national election. He explained the importance that Karzai not overstate victory in an election that had been perceived to be fraudulent. Increasingly, the international press has attacked Karzai’s legitimacy. He is further accused of nepotism exacerbated by alleged corruption. Once the favorite of US policymakers, Karzai appears willing to reject US support if it may threaten his political base. At the same time, the Taliban want to return to power in

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Afghanistan. To do so, they seek to destabilize the central government by discrediting it as an apostate regime that is propped up by a foreign power.

To survive, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan needs a substantial revenue stream to supplement and eventually replace some foreign aid. The government will need its own money to sustain the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police Force, and other key organizations inside Afghanistan. This does not mean that foreign aid to Afghanistan should completely dry-up. Afghanistan does not have to be completely self-sustaining. In fact, the United States should budget for some permanent level of funding, similar to as done with Egypt and other nations to maintain favorable relations over a long period of time.⁴⁷ Fortunately, Afghanistan has a great deal of strategic value that could drive its economy.

Afghanistan's interest in economic development and a market economy will increase the nation's strategic value. In general, strategic value depends upon on the scale of its intrinsic resources, manufactures, and exports. During the 1800s, Afghanistan exported horses, dried fruits, madder, wool, and silk.⁴⁸ Through the twentieth century, exports continued at a relatively modest scale. In the past, neither world nor regional markets required much from Afghanistan. In 2007, the situation changed. Afghanistan has everything in its soil that it needs to become a modern nation.⁴⁹ Within its borders and beneath its surface, metals, strategic minerals, oil, and natural gas reside in economically significant amounts.⁵⁰ The nation sets atop over one trillion dollars in natural resources.⁵¹ If a mining industry were take root, Afghanistan

⁴⁷ Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Budgeting for Hard Power: Defense and Security Spending under Barak Obama* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009).

⁴⁸ James Cornwell, *A School Geography*, 15th ed. (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1881), 228.

⁴⁹ The Times, "Afghanistan Copper Deposits Worth \$88 Billion Attract Chinese Investors," Timesonline.com, 15 May 2008, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article3941656.ece>.

⁵⁰ United States Geological Survey, Preliminary Assessment of Non-Fuel Mineral Resources of Afghanistan, 2007, US Government Fact Sheet 2007-3063 (Washington DC: Department of the Interior, February 2007), 1.

⁵¹ Global Research, "Afghan Geological Reserves Worth a Trillion Dollars." Global Research.ca, 1 February 2010,

could decrease its reliance on imported materials to become a self-sustaining nation.

President Karzai's interest in regional cooperation taps into the historical position the country occupies at the crossroads of Empires. The country's central geographic position makes Afghanistan attractive as a major trade route - a modern Silk Road. Additionally, the potential to create a new, modern Silk Road exists that can directly connect Chinese, Middle Eastern, European, Indian, and other markets to each other. New transit routes could connect Afghanistan to additional sea ports in Pakistan and Iran. If it were created, an aerial Silk Road, enabled by civil aviation, could overcome the barriers of rugged geography to move goods through, within, and over Afghanistan. An aerial Silk Road, paved by a revitalized civil aviation industry, could become a cash register in the sky. In terms of energy flows, pipelines could bring hydrocarbons to China, India, and Pakistan from Iran and the oil-endowed Central Asian kingdoms. Neighboring states want overland routes through Afghanistan to move energy-rich hydrocarbons from Central Asia and the Middle East to satiate the two fastest growing economies in the world, India and China.

At this juncture in history, Afghanistan also has a non-isolationist government eager to bring in significant investments and increase trade through Afghanistan. President Karzai stated:

Strong regional cooperation is a major contributor to social, economic and cultural growth of countries. With the cooperation of our neighbors and the rest of the world, we intend to expand regional solidarity through practical measures in regional trade and transit, aiming to position Afghanistan as a bridge between the countries of Central Asia, South-East Asia, and the Middle East. Afghanistan has the potential to become a transit corridor for goods and energy between north and south Asia. Connecting Afghanistan to the region's railway networks, and linking the countries of the region through Afghanistan to regional roads and

sea ports, present some of the real opportunities that can bring the countries of our region together.

Those words reflect the dreams of Amir Abdur Rahman, Afghan ruler during the late 1800s, who adopted an isolationist stance because his neighbors had too much power. In the modern age, Afghanistan's survival depends upon railways, airports, and roads to bring it out of depression into prosperity. Regional cooperation is the path.

Afghanistan's interest includes combating the cultivation and trafficking of illicit drugs. 90% of the world's illicit supply of opium comes from Afghanistan.⁵² Illicit drugs drive a significant regional concern. Addicts in Russia, Iran, and Europe consume nearly half of a \$65 billion illegal narcotics market enabled by Afghanistan poppies.⁵³ Drug money also fuels the Taliban insurgency.⁵⁴ Regional states and the United States have a common interest with Afghanistan in diminishing poppy production. Russia and Iran place counter-narcotics near the top of their interests. The Department of State's strategy includes a significant emphasis on counter-narcotics. The United States is on pace to spend \$1.5 Billion over FY09-FY11 period on combating narcotics.⁵⁵

Current US strategy uses the counterinsurgency campaign to build time and space for the Afghans to build state capacity in military and law enforcement. Rightly, the US strategy prioritizes agricultural development because most Afghans work in agriculture.⁵⁶ However, the purpose should also emphasize the creation of time and space to unleash the forces of

⁵² Christopher M. Blanchard, "Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy," (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2009), 1. For a complete review of the Poppy situation in Afghanistan, see: "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009: Summary Findings," (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009).

⁵³ UNODC, "Addiction, Crime and Insurgency: The Threat of Afghan Opium," (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009), 22. Note: In general, the United Nations Report provides a comprehensive look at security threat posed by Afghanistan's poppy.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 111.

⁵⁵ "Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy," ed. Department of State (Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan 2010), 12.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 50.

economic change and regional cooperation. This may mean realigning American power against the portions of Afghanistan where the greatest wealth generating potential exists. Security is essential for the Afghans to establish a mining industry and to build roads, airports, and railroads for modern trade routes. American power can provide the security necessary until the Afghan government can take over the security. Most importantly, the outside investors and companies must employ Afghans rather than bring in their own labor. These jobs will provide Afghans with an alternative to joining the insurgency. Furthermore, big regional economies need resources and transit capability which Afghanistan can offer.

Trade, minerals, and counter-narcotics present new opportunities for regional cooperation on common interests. Though this potential exists, realizing the benefits is not guaranteed. Although conditions exist for significant cooperation between states, balancing behaviors by several regional states could easily derail the modernization of Afghanistan. How development occurs and who among the various interested parties will benefit first and most are enormous concerns. Airpower can have a significant role in supporting these economic lines of operation and will be addressed in a later chapter.

Regional Actors

Regional actors will continue to have significant influence on what happens inside Afghanistan. If the regional states are helpful, then the coalition has a greater chance to succeed. Currently, some regional states provide transit routes for NATO's supplies. Others provide significant reconstruction aid to Afghanistan. If the regional states are not helpful or seek to disrupt coalition efforts, then the strategy can come apart. Indeed, in counterinsurgency war outside sponsorship to an insurgency can be a decisive element for an insurgent victory.

During the 1990s, outside state sponsors competed with each other for influence in Afghanistan. In the past, regional states contributed primarily to proxy wars inside Afghanistan. During the 1990s, Afghanistan was embroiled

in a violent civil war pitting the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, formed by the Taliban, against the Islamic State of Afghanistan, headed by the United Front or later the Northern Alliance.⁵⁷ Through these two opponents, regional actors engaged in a proxy war, and both sides received significant outside sponsorship. Russia, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan supplied arms, training, equipment, and logistical support to the Northern alliance.⁵⁸ In opposition, Pakistan invested heavily in the Taliban by providing the same types of support plus recruiting from and training in sanctuaries inside Pakistan.⁵⁹ Pakistan fared better in the contest as the Taliban almost won the entire Afghan country by 2001. During this period, regional actors attempted to shape the internal make-up of Afghanistan in line with its self-interest. The primary driver was to create conditions best for their particular nation's security.

Though security interests remain paramount today, outside sponsorship appears to be weighted towards cooperative reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Though security interests remain paramount, common interests appear to favor cooperation among the regional states—or at least competition is based on economic rather than military contributions. A greater degree of cooperation may exist because of the immense potential that Afghanistan has as a trade route and a supplier of strategic minerals. Conditions in the region appear to be more cooperative and aimed at stabilizing the country for economic reasons. While security concerns remain, economic interests have elevated in importance. For today's conflict, the regional states can have a profound effect on Coalition strategy. For this reason, a strategist must understand their aims and interests, and how to leverage these interests to gain an advantage.

⁵⁷ "Fueling Afghanistan's War: Press Backgrounder," The Institute for Afghan Studies, http://www.institute-for-afghan-studies.org/UNITED%20NATIONS/SANCTIONS/hrw_report.htm#Military%20Support%20to%20the%20Taliban.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan: Interests & Analysis

Pakistan is vital to any strategy to secure Afghanistan. After Great Britain withdrew from India in 1947, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of India emerged as new regional actors. Fierce enmity existed and continues to exist between the two nations, originating from disputes over the location of the 1947 partition and control over the territory of Kashmir. India and Pakistan fought three major wars against each other. Increasing the stakes, both now possess nuclear weapons. Given their mutual history, Pakistan's primary strategic concern has been and remains India.⁶⁰

India creates a security dilemma for Pakistan. At 1 billion, its population is ten times larger than Pakistan's. It possesses superior military capabilities compared to Pakistan, and in the last ten years, India's relative seapower, airpower, and conventional military capabilities have only increased the gap. These forces put at risk a majority of Pakistan's commercial industries, air bases, nuclear facilities, and other key strategic nodes. Furthermore, India has placed a sizeable number of military forces along its border with Pakistan. Depending upon world events or poor relations with Pakistan, these forces go on alert. For instance, when a suicide bomber attacked the Indian parliament in December 2001, India surged troops on its western border. It accused the Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency of sponsoring the terrorist group that attacked the parliament.⁶¹ Consequently, Pakistan's actions are based on perceived and actual threats posed by India.⁶²

To mitigate the significant capability and resource gap, Pakistan developed two strategic weapons. It developed nuclear weapons as a means of deterrence, primarily aimed at its arch rival. Pakistan's second strategic weapon was the fundamentalist Islamic movement resident in Afghanistan

⁶⁰ Kanishk Sathasiva, *Uneasy Neighbors: India, Pakistan, and Us Foreign Policy* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 153.

⁶¹ Syed Naqvi, "India, Pakistan Build up Border Forces," *CNN.com* (23 December 2001), <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/south/12/23/india.pakistan/index.html>.

⁶² Ross Massood Hussain, "Threat Perception and Military Planning in Pakistan: The Impact of Technology, Doctrine, and Arms Control," in *Military Capacity and the Risk of War: China, India, Pakistan, and Iran*, ed. Eric H. Arnett, 130.

during the 1990s. By creating these groups and helping them achieve power in Afghanistan, Pakistan could positively affect its own security.

Historically, Pakistan's interest in Afghanistan is organized around a military doctrine of *strategic depth*. The concept refers to a defensive strategy of denying an adversary access to geographic locations from which to attack.⁶³ Having strategic depth preserves an area for a military force to go in the event of an invasion, and Pakistan may have plans to move its forces into Afghanistan if India were to invade. Strategic depth thus creates the potential for vital political and economic links to Central Asia.⁶⁴ Because its sovereign territory is not wide, Pakistan creates an effective strategic depth by influencing the internal make-up of Afghanistan.

Pakistan has been influential in shaping Afghanistan into an Islamic versus a secular state. Pakistan sponsored fundamentalist Afghan Islamic groups, such as the Mujahedeen in the 1980s and the Taliban in the 1990s. These groups made it problematic for Pakistan's adversaries to establish friendly relationships with Afghanistan. By denying enemy influence in Afghanistan, Pakistan created a favorable environment for its own purposes. Of utmost importance, a friendly relationship with Afghanistan allows Pakistan to concentrate most of its military forces along the Indian-Pakistan border.

However, Pakistan's alliance with the United States to counter terrorism has jeopardized its relationship with the very strategic weapon that it created. Recently, Jihad groups have focused in towards the Pakistan government. In 2007, a suicide bomber exploded a bomb outside the general headquarters building of the Pakistan Army.⁶⁵ In 2009, a small team of armed men attacked the same headquarters resulting in the deaths of over twenty people.⁶⁶ Because

⁶³ George Garner, "The Afghan Taliban and Pakistan's 'Strategic Depth' " <http://bellum.stanfordreview.org/?p=2184>.

⁶⁴ "Crisis of Impunity: The Role of Pakistan, Russia, and Iran in Fueling the Civil War in Afghanistan," (Human Rights Watch, 2001), 24.

⁶⁵ "Highlights of the Aap World Wire at 19:30 Oct 30," *AAP General News Wire* (2007).

⁶⁶ Anonymous, "Highlights of the Aap World Wire at 08:00 Oct 12," *AAP General News Wire* (2009). Short wire reports the consideration given to Pakistan's ability to control its nuclear material.

of these types of attacks, Pakistan now faces a growing existential threat within its borders. For Pakistan to place greater attention on this threat, it needs a long term relationship with the United States. The strategic calculus of Pakistan considers past relationships with America.

From the historical perspective, the United States has been an unreliable ally to Pakistan. History has shown that America abandoned Afghanistan and Pakistan when its own interests were threatened or achieved. During Pakistan's war with India in 1965, the United States suspended military assistance to both India and Pakistan. In 1979, the United States ceased economic assistance to Pakistan, only to resume it when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. After its Cold War opponent was defeated in Afghanistan, America nearly eliminated all financial and equipment support to the Afghan resistance and to Pakistan. Instead, America applied sanctions to curtail the sale of military equipment to Pakistan as punishment for Pakistan's pursuit of a nuclear program. Since 2001, the United States had committed tens of billions of dollars to Pakistan to build its conventional and counterinsurgency capacities. However, Pakistan may believe that once the United States achieves its interests, it will abandon the region again.

Regional states, especially Pakistan, view America's behavior in light of the historical pattern. Consequently, United States leadership has acknowledged its record of past behavior and has pronounced a long term commitment to Pakistan. Secretary Gates said, "We are determined to be a reliable and long-term ally."⁶⁷ The United States Congress has approved billion dollar aid packages to back those words. With a long-term commitment and presence in the region, the United States can continue to influence the Pakistan-India relationship, and help support the counterinsurgency mission in Afghanistan. Diplomacy with India may allow Pakistan to focus internally against a new existential threat posed by extremists rather than organizing, training, and equipping for a conventional battle with India. The United States

⁶⁷ Donna Miles, "Gates: Extremism Biggest Threat to Pakistan, India," American Press Editor, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=57660>.

has developed a \$700M FY09 counterinsurgency fund to help build Pakistan's counterinsurgency capabilities.⁶⁸ For example, the aid package funded a fleet of small unmanned aerial systems for use by the Pakistani military.⁶⁹ This fund will buy other airpower capabilities for Pakistan to wage counterinsurgency. A long-term US commitment to Pakistan will continue to encourage Pakistan to focus on denying sanctuary operations.

Sanctuary in Pakistan poses a significant threat to success in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the Pakistan central government lacks effective control of its Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and of a significant portion of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). The Taliban exert sizeable control in the FATA and the NWFP (see Figure 6). Both areas provide sanctuary to Taliban leaders and provide a ready pool of recruits to join Jihad against the foreign presence in Afghanistan. The FATA also enables the Taliban to benefit from having a relatively unimpeded, centralized organization, and a place to reconstitute. The sanctuary provides an uncontested area for Taliban insurgents to stage attacks into Afghanistan.⁷⁰ The Taliban used Shura councils to establish a web of supporting tribes that support or tolerate their movements, sanctuary, and presence. Within the sanctuary, the Taliban are uncontested in the information domain. Sanctuary denial is critical to success in Afghanistan.

The Taliban maintain this sanctuary by heavy-handed tactics with some tribes or giving other tribes a basis for Jihad to fight in Afghanistan. During the 1996-2001, the Taliban were effective in undermining Pashtun tribal power structures by co-opting tribal elders or having them assassinated.⁷¹ The

⁶⁸ "Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy," 13. From the State Department's Strategy Document

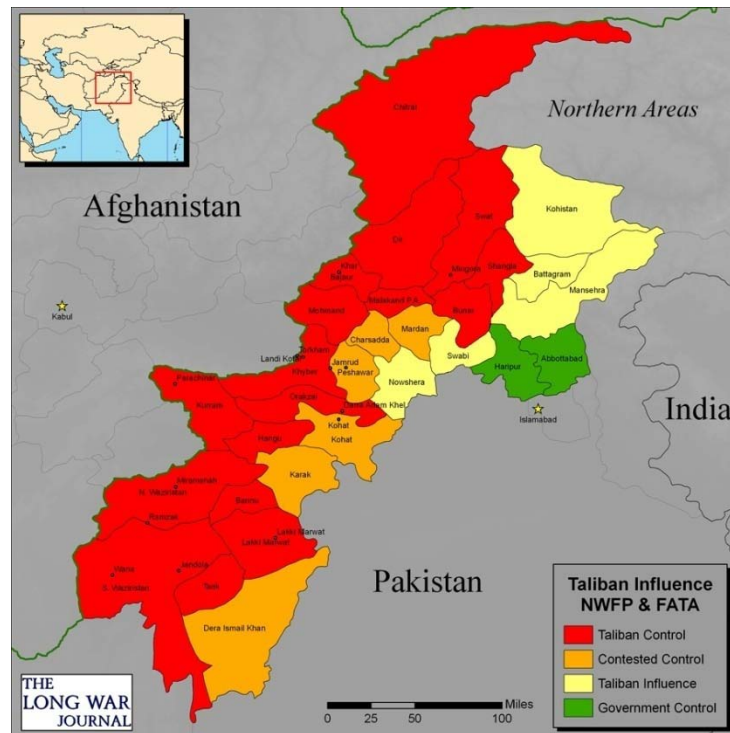
⁶⁹ Miles, "Gates: Extremism Biggest Threat to Pakistan, India." Article discusses the potential procurement of RQ-7 Shadow Unmanned Aerial Systems for Pakistan.

⁷⁰ It is important to note that many Taliban are local people who live in Afghanistan. Not all Taliban originate from the sanctuary. However, the sanctuary provided a place to reconstitute, train, and recruit relatively uncontested.

⁷¹ Abdulkader H. Sinno, *Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

Taliban disarmed Pashtun commanders when they did not ally with the Taliban.⁷²

Figure 6: The Sanctuary and Taliban Influence in Pakistan



Source: <http://www.longwarjournal.org/maps/Pakistan/NWFP24APR09.php>

Adjacent to the sanctuary, the Afghan-Pakistan border is highly porous and nearly bisects the Pashtun population of nearly 42.5 million people (see Figure 7).⁷³ The Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan originates in the Pashtun population that spans the eastern, southern, and western portions of Afghanistan. This reality can make it easier for the Taliban to move through the Pashtun population over this border relatively undetected. According to the analysis of historical counterinsurgencies of Dr Kaleb Sepp, having open borders is an unsuccessful counterinsurgency best practice.⁷⁴ The United

⁷² Ibid., 241-3.

⁷³ This is the largest population in the world not to have its own sovereign state.

⁷⁴ Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency."

States must assist Pakistan in sealing the borders. The solution to these borders resides with the tribal people who live along the border.

Figure 7: Pashtun Areas



Source: http://www.motherjones.com/files/images/Blog_Pashtun_Map_0.jpg

Success to securing Afghanistan depends upon an effective strategy in Pakistan. In building that strategy, Pakistan's security interests must be kept in mind. Pakistan believes its primary existential threat is India. Only recently has the nation taken interest in a second existential threat emerging from its Northwest Frontier. As a result of historical orientation towards India, the Pakistan military developed a conventional military with little capacity for counterinsurgency that it faces in its Northwest Frontier. To reverse this, the United States continues to provide billions in funding to transform Pakistan's military from a conventional force to one that also has counterinsurgency tools. The organizational paradigm of the Pakistan military must change from one of strategic depth through support to Jihad groups to one that acknowledges diplomatic methods to achieve its interests. Furthermore, India's actions in Afghanistan must be viewed from the perspective of Pakistan. The United States can help by promoting positive contributions by India in Afghanistan and discouraging actions that Pakistan will view as threatening.

The Republic of India: Interests & Analysis

India's relationship with Afghanistan dates back to the times of the world's greatest empires. The Greeks, the Persians, the Afghans, and the Mongols used Afghanistan as the invasion route to the Indian subcontinent. These empires first established a foothold on the Kabul plain with the Hindu Kush mountain range at their backs. Armies passed through one or more of the strategic gates represented by the Khyber Pass, the Bolan Pass, and other mountain passes in Kashmir. From there, these conquering armies traversed through the northwest region of India on their way to conquer Delhi. Upon victory, each conqueror looted India's wealth and at times massacred a substantial number of people. In every case, except conquest by the British Empire, the path to domination of India began on the plains and mountains of Afghanistan.

The same realization captivated the British Empire when it possessed India. Known as the jewel in the crown, India was perhaps its most important colonial acquisition. Rather than by the classic land route, Britain used sea and economic power as the principle means to steadily subjugate the subcontinent. Beginning in 1600, the British East India Company established first contact along the south-eastern coastline. For the next two centuries, Britain expanded its hold on the subcontinent by moving north up through current day Pakistan, including the Northwest Frontier province. Designs by Persia and Russia to expand into Afghanistan by either force or diplomacy concerned the British. These factors shaped British policy that focused on ensuring a government in Afghanistan favorable to British interests in the Indian subcontinent. In 1947, these same viewpoints transferred to India and Pakistan as both achieved independence. This reality continues to inform the consciousness of the state of India. In modern times, the strategic importance of Afghanistan for India lies beyond concern over the classic invasion route.

Today, India's interests in Afghanistan are for its security. The state does not want the Taliban or other extremist form of Islam to regain control in

Afghanistan. This is consistent with India's support to the Northern Alliance during the 1990s to counter the Taliban. Their fear arises from the potential of an extremist ideology that might influence and destabilize a sizeable Muslim population resident within India. A strong Islamic state closely allied with Pakistan might further threaten India, if that condition allows Pakistan to completely focus its military force at the Indian border. In a pure realist model, India would want to divide Pakistan's attention and forces by creating a security concern in Afghanistan.

To maintain its security, India, like the United States, does not want the Taliban or any other fundamentalist group or terrorist organizations to return to power or re-establish footholds in Afghanistan. A safe haven in Afghanistan and in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) has produced trained personnel and plans that resulted in violence inside India. For example, the individuals involved in the Mumbai attack of 2008 were Islamic extremists trained in Pakistan.⁷⁵ Camps in Afghanistan and FATA have also trained fighters who attempt to destabilize the Indian administered portion of Kashmir. India has serious concerns about the future of Afghanistan for this reason alone.

In addition to its potential security concerns, and because India's population tops 1.1 billion people, with a crushing demand for energy and jobs, India also has an interest in Afghanistan's economic possibilities. A stable, relatively neutral Afghanistan definitely serves India's economic interests. As has been the case throughout history, India recognizes that Afghanistan is the gateway to the energy and mineral rich Central Asian states, and a route to important economic trade markets. The potential for oil and gas pipelines through Afghanistan is high as an additional supply route to meet growing demand. Large reconstruction projects in Afghanistan provide opportunities for Indian companies to profit while also furthering the interests of the state. Indian companies are involved in road construction, electrical power projects,

⁷⁵ http://www.montereyherald.com/news/ci_15012948

construction of Afghan government buildings, and water infrastructure projects. These interests have compelled India to become the fifth largest bilateral donor to Afghanistan.⁷⁶ During March 2010, over four thousand Indian nationals worked on a variety of infrastructure projects. India has invested approximately \$1.2 billion to build medical and education facilities.⁷⁷ Other projects assist with the potential for new trade routes.

During August 2008, India completed the Zaranj-Delaram road that provides Afghanistan with a reliable overland route from central Afghanistan to the Iranian border. The new roadway connects to a series of rail and other roads that eventually lead to Iran's Chahbahar port. The route provides Afghanistan a second pathway to the sea—beyond the traditional route to Pakistan's port in Karachi. Because Pakistan has denied India overland access to Afghanistan, India values the road significantly. Using the major Iranian port, India can bypass Pakistan completely for overland distribution of goods into Afghanistan. During a ceremony on January 22, 2009, India's Prime Minister officially delivered ownership of the road to the Afghan government.⁷⁸

Clearly, India's involvement in Afghanistan is driven by self-interest. The economic projects establish new connections for trade. Agricultural development in Afghanistan helps India with food. India's projects also generate goodwill toward India by providing jobs for Afghans. India's diplomatic consulates establish presence. Though India's pursuit of self interests helps stabilize Afghanistan, they also influence the attitudes of Pakistan. Consequently, the United States should evaluate how Pakistan will view India's activities in Afghanistan. Having examined Pakistan's eastern neighbor, the analysis turns to west to Iran.

⁷⁶ "India: Afghanistan's Influential Ally," *BBC*, no. 8 October 2009 (2009), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7492982.stm>.

⁷⁷ <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics/nation/India-to-go-ahead-with-projects-in-Afghanistan/articleshow/5635379.cms>

⁷⁸ http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report_india-hands-over-zaranj-delaram-highway-to-afghanistan_1224045

The Republic of Iran: Interests & Analysis

A deeper understanding of Iran is critical to the United States' counter-insurgency strategy in Afghanistan. Depending upon whether diplomacy sets conditions for cooperation or competition, the United States may gain or suffer from Iran's policy towards Afghanistan. Iranian choices run the gamut from directly sponsoring insurgents to helping the coalition stabilize Afghanistan through reconstruction aid. Iran can affect stability in Afghanistan by deporting Afghan refugees, for example, or balance the United States using rhetoric that describes Western actions as failing and as a foreign presence. Somewhere in between is the current practice of remaining inactive in disrupting sanctuary and support.

Iran has significant connections to Afghanistan. A six hundred-mile border fuels ongoing tensions over Afghan refugees, border insecurity, and illicit narcotics trafficking. Iran's geopolitical position in Central Asia may account for its policy. Several natural barriers form a formidable, protective boundary around the country. To the north, the Caspian Sea separates it from Russia. To the south, the Persian Gulf isolates Iran from its classic regional competitor, Saudi Arabia. Its borders with Afghanistan and Iraq consist of rugged mountainous terrain. While these geographic features offer strategic protection from regional competitors, they also pose challenges.

Iran's security interests regarding Afghanistan vary. The presence of American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan pose a dual-edged security concern to Iran.⁷⁹ Iran is interested in containing the United States perhaps by keeping it embroiled in Afghanistan so it cannot focus full attention on Iran's nuclear ambitions.⁸⁰ Iran's relationship to Taliban insurgents surfaces occasionally. In 2009, the Director of National Intelligence asserted that Iranian government had covertly supplied "small arms, mines, rocket propelled grenades (RPGs),

⁷⁹ http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1320/MR1320.ch6.pdf

⁸⁰ <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/feb2010/2010-02-16-01.html>

rockets, mortars, and plastic explosives” to insurgents in Afghanistan.⁸¹ Again in 2009, a report claimed that Iran had provided surface-to-air anti-helicopter missiles to the Taliban.⁸² In 2010, Defense Secretary Robert Gates suggested a relationship between Iran and Taliban insurgents, describing it as fairly limited.⁸³ Subsequently, General Stanley McChrystal explained that clear evidence points to sanctuary in Iran where Taliban fighters have been trained and equipped.⁸⁴

Iran is concerned about access to water. Major rivers flow from Afghanistan’s central highlands to Iran. Plans for new hydroelectric dams concern Iranians. They believe these dams will significantly reduce the flow of water supply to Iran’s eastern territory. These concerns motivate support to insurgents who can disrupt reconstruction projects. For example, a recent report indicates that Iranians paid insurgents to attack a construction site for the Salma dam near Herat. The \$150 million hydroelectric dam will provide electricity to Afghanistan cities, but reduce the flow of water into Iran.

Illicit narcotics pose a significant security concern to Iran. Iran has nearly 1 million people addicted to heroin and opium.⁸⁵ Despite advantageous rugged terrain along the Iranian-Afghanistan border, the illegal drug trade continues across the 1000 kilometer long Iran-Afghanistan border. On March 23, 2010, CNN reported on the discovery of hidden mountain trails that drug and weapons smugglers routinely use.⁸⁶

Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad regularly indicates his nation’s desire for greater regional influence when expressing the historical greatness of Persia and gains significant prestige by standing up to Israel and the United States. Iran also builds its influence through reconstruction projects inside

⁸¹ <http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/iranian-influence-afghanistan-recent-developments>

⁸² Smith, Michael, "Missile Threat to British Troops," *The Sunday Times* (2009), <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article5822094.ece>.

⁸³ <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1971300,00.html>

⁸⁴ Heidi Vogt and Rahim Faiez, "Nato General: Taliban Are Training in Iran," *MSNBC.com* (30 May 2010), http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/37425874/ns/worldnews-south_central_asia/.

⁸⁵ UNODC, "Addiction, Crime and Insurgency: The Threat of Afghan Opium," 27.

⁸⁶ <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/03/23/iran.afghanistan.weapons.taliban/index.html>

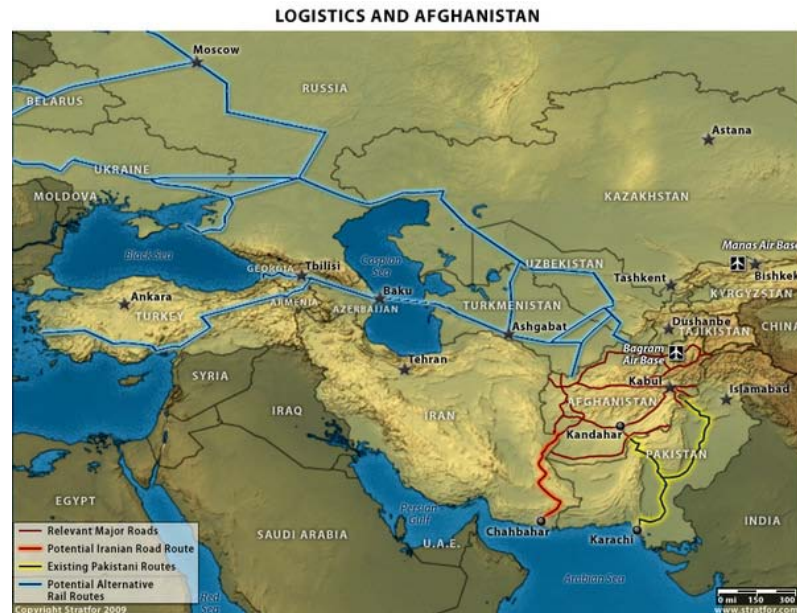
Afghanistan. For example, Iran funded the telecommunications infrastructure between Iran and Afghanistan and ensured Herat's accessibility to an international telecommunication network."⁸⁷ Afghanistan potentially offers Iran access to new economic markets. In particular, Iran wants to sell natural gas and petroleum to China and India—and needs a stable Afghanistan to do so. As with all surrounding nations, Iran's can have positive and negative influences on America strategy in Afghanistan. Knowing the context helps with strategy development.

Why Regional Context Matters

America's strategy fundamentally depends upon regional actors adjacent to and in close proximity to Afghanistan. When America's strategy reaches full military strength, Afghanistan will contain 100,000 US military personnel, tens of thousands of Coalition partner personnel, and American citizens serving in non-governmental organizations. Significantly, all lines of communication to support this force and other personnel go through or above the territories of regional states (see Figure 8). These lines of communication can be threatened by internal political conditions, loss of US diplomatic favor with these countries, balance of power in the region, and obviously guerrilla tactics by Taliban and other adversaries. Though airpower has the potential to overcome many of these issues, it too has been and can be affected by regional states as overflight and basing rights depend on their permission. The strategic risk to this force cannot be taken for granted. The worst case scenario, as the British experienced in Afghanistan in the nineteenth century, is that this force becomes isolated for an extended period of time.

⁸⁷ <http://www.zawya.com/story.cfm/sidZAWYA20060516035604/First%20Iran-Afghanistan%20fiber-optic%20project%20on%20line%20>

Figure 8: Example of Supply Routes through Regional Actors



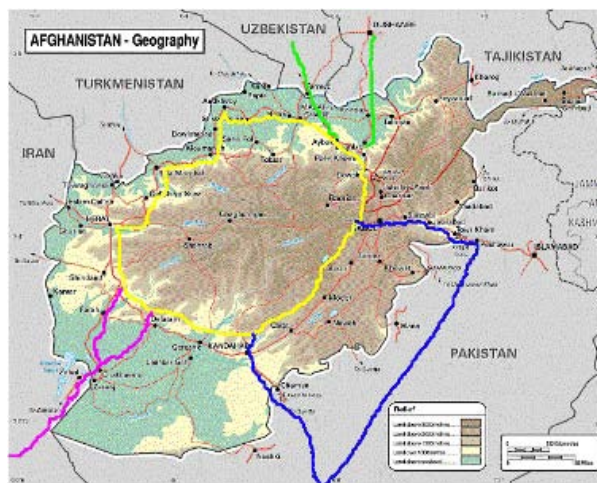
Source: [http://eurodialogue.org/files/fckeditor_files/Afghanistan-Logistics-transit\(1\).jpg](http://eurodialogue.org/files/fckeditor_files/Afghanistan-Logistics-transit(1).jpg) from [Straffor.com](http://www.traffor.com).

The political conditions within and between regional states can affect NATO supply lines. During April 2009, unrest in Kyrgyzstan temporarily halted flying operations into and out of Manas airbase for a few days.⁸⁸ The United States leases Manas from the Kyrgyzstan government and uses the base as a critical transportation node to move troops and supplies. Furthermore, NATO shipments of food and fuel travel by railroad through the Central Asian states bordering Afghanistan. On 24 May 2010, Uzbekistan blocked rail shipments to Tajikistan, because of tensions arising over cross-border water use. At the center of the dispute is a proposed hydro-electric dam in Tajikistan that will affect the water flow into Uzbekistan.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Tony Capaccio, "Kyrgyzstan Air Base Is Back to Normal Operations, U.S. Says," *Boomerang*, <http://businessweek.com/news/2010-04-09/kyrgyzstan-air-base-is-back-to-normal-operations-u-s-says.html>.

⁸⁹ Reuters, "Central Asia Spat Disrupts Nato Supplies," *The Moscow Times*, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/central-asia-spat-disrupts-nato-supplies/406895.html>.

Figure 9: Supply lines through Pakistan



Source: <http://www.moonofalabama.org/2009/06/afghanistan-northern-supply-lines-under-attack-1.html>

The insurgent groups can threaten NATO supply routes that transect the length of Pakistan. A key line of communication originates in the port city Karachi and terminated in Kabul (see rightmost blue line in Figure 9). As a classic insurgent tactic, the Taliban and other groups have relied on disperse, small teams to strike along key lines-of-communication.⁹⁰ In 2008, two hundred Taliban guerilla fighters destroyed NATO supply trucks near the Khyber Pass.⁹¹ Also in 2008, four hundred Taliban fighters seized supplies in transit through the Khyber tribal agency in the North-West frontier.⁹² In 2010, a small team on motorbikes attacked a NATO truck convoy in the port city of Karachi where 300-500 trucks carrying NATO supplies embark every day.⁹³

The Athenian Sicilian Campaign exemplifies the worst case of strategic isolation, and it is instructive to the situation today. During its war in Sicily,

⁹⁰ Richard A. Oppel Jr. and Pir ZUBAIR SHAH, "Amid Wide Taliban Rule, a Nato Supply Line in Pakistan Is Choked," *New York Times* 2008. See also: T. E. Lawrence. "The Evolution of a Revolt." (Place Published: Combat Studies Institute, 1920), <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS68452>. Lawrence describes insurgent tactics against lines of communication.

⁹¹ Richard A. Jr Oppel and Pir Zubair Shah, "Amid Wide Taliban Rule, a Nato Supply Line in Pakistan Is Choked," *New York Times* 2008, A.6.

⁹² Hussain Zahid and Rosenberg Matthew, "World News: Militant Attacks Impede Nato Supply Route from Pakistan," *Wall Street Journal* 2008, A.8.

⁹³ Yusuf Huma, "Rare Afghanistan Convoy Attack in Normally Safe Pakistan City," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 28 January 2010.

Athens launched the largest, most resourced military force in its history to fight against Syracuse. As the greatest economic and military power in the region, Athens possessed asymmetric military capabilities that enabled it to project force over a significant distance. Athenian maritime capabilities were unmatched. However, Syracuse was able to completely trap the Athenian force in the Bay of Sicily where the confined space neutralized the maneuverability advantage of Athenian seapower. As a result, Syracuse won a decisive victory at sea. Athenian forces beached their ships on the Island of Sicily and became completely cut off from resources and any route of escape.

This situation partly arose from the balance of power interest of other powers. Sparta and other city states had common interest in checking Athenian power. New alliances were formed to check Athenian power while it was at war in a distant location. Sparta provided military know-how to the Sryacusians by sending the Spartiate Gylippus who trained them how to fight the Athenians. Corinth provided a small fleet of ships to bring Gylippus and supplies to Sicily. Other city states placed ships along key sea lines of communication to challenge Athens. The consequence to the deployed force was catastrophic.⁹⁴ The story speaks to the potential consequences when a military force is cut off from its supplies through enemy action as well as the actions of regional actors.

When considering the landlocked nature of Afghanistan, a strategist must consider the worst case scenario and think through how best to avoid a situation like the one experienced by Athens. United States Central Command is right to diversify the lines of communication into Afghanistan. Using airpower can alleviate problems of overland routes. Airpower can also deter regional actors from threatening the force more directly.

⁹⁴ See Thucydides, *The Landmark Thucydides : A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*.

Conclusions

The analysis of the contemporary situation reveals a highly interconnected, complex system in which the United States wages a counterinsurgency war. The situation has every characteristic of a *wicked problem*.⁹⁵ There is no right answer. Every action tried may result in undesired second- and third-order effects. For instance, the inherent goodness of building hydroelectric dams can cause consternation in Afghanistan's surrounding neighbors over reduced water flow. However, it is clear from the general practice of warfare that strategy should aim to deny sanctuary, sever outside sponsorship, and diminish financial resources of an opponent. The situation in Afghanistan calls for a higher order of strategy based on the interests of many actors.

There are more players, both internally and externally, than can be mentioned here. The actors described in the section are the most directly involved, and the level of complexity they generate through disparate interests and contingent policies is daunting. To meet its security goals, the United States participates in the balance of power dynamic via costly military presence, sizeable aid, and maintenance of a long supply line. Its national goal is to significantly decrease this investment by rapidly replacing America's deployed security apparatus with Afghan military and law enforcement capacity.

Today's context presents a strategist with more options. As opposed to the 1980s and 1990s, regional actors have common interests other than competitively supporting proxy war. Instead, a potentially cooperative environment exists that the United States can leverage to meet its own pragmatic security objectives. Regional cooperation offers the United States more options to create an Afghanistan favorable to meeting its security interests. Combating narcotics trafficking interests all the regional actors who have significant numbers of people addicted to Afghanistan poppy products.

⁹⁵ H. Rittel and M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences* 4 (1973).

Trade offers another area of cooperation. The two most populous countries on the earth would benefit from new trade routes through Afghanistan. The nations in Central Asia and Iran could move oil and gas to these markets. Additionally, Afghanistan possesses natural resources that regional states desire. Much like the British and the Russians did in the Convention of 1907 to end the Great Game, the regional actors, the United States, and other coalition members can seek new levels of cooperation to resolve Afghanistan.

The United States can use its military, political, and economic power to create time and space for regional cooperation to emerge and unleash fundamental changes in Afghan society. The United States and the regional states should go big by setting conditions to remake the social order in Afghanistan. Technology can drive change in human social organization. Trade routes, mining industry, civil aviation can remake a significant portion of Afghanistan.⁹⁶ Describing how is beyond the scope here. However, the role of force is.

As one of the many contributors, airpower gives America a seat at the balance of power table in Central Asia. The capability allows the United States to project power from great distance, much as the British did with sea power during the height of its empire. However, airpower provides the United States a unique ability to project force to and within a landlocked country like no other world power before it. Airpower can allow the regional cooperation described herein to happen. But this power must comply with the unique aspects of Afghanistan.

⁹⁶ See Lynn White's *Medieval and Social Change*. White argues that the three-tiered agricultural system fundamentally changed Western Europe. Also see: Smith and Marx *Does Technology Drive History?*

Chapter 4

Airpower in Pursuit of Interests

I am utterly convinced that the outstanding and vital lesson is that airpower is the dominant factor in this modern world and that, though the methods of exercising it will change, it will remain the dominant factor, so long as power determines the fate of nations.

Lord Tedder 1947

The previous chapters isolated historic internal and balancing variables crucial to understanding the challenges of creating regional stability and cooperation that are consistent with America's interests. It is not too much to assert that the extent to which the US is able to influence events in Afghanistan is heavily dependent on its capacity to use airpower. The rest of this thesis is focused on what could reasonably be called a responsible airpower strategy in theater.

Unfortunately, airpower is being de-emphasized precisely at a crossroads in American policy where it can most effectively be employed. This is due in part because of a poorly articulated understanding of airpower that changes the context of relations in the region. As with most technologies, airpower can help or hurt in Afghanistan through its interaction with the population. Successful strategy hinges on its responsible use. This chapter provides a brief historical account of airpower strategies used in Afghanistan, and then presents an examination of strategies considered by the United States. Within this framework, effects and limitations of these strategies are presented, including pervasive opinions on the limitations of airpower in Afghanistan and

COIN, culminating in General McChrystal's 2009 statement concerning the efficacy of airpower.

History: Airpower in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's unique geography has shaped its history and culture. The country is completely landlocked. Mountains separate the main cities. Harsh geographic and weather conditions have always complicated ground travel. Hundreds of tribes still control virtually autonomous regions of the country, making it difficult for outsiders to traverse the land without permission or hassle. Through the centuries, the rugged terrain has offered sanctuary for indigenous warriors when they have contended with outside powers or, just as often, with their own central government. Since 1979, the widespread existence of landmines has threatened movement by foot through mountain passes. All this has conspired to economically and technologically isolate Afghanistan, to curtail unification, and limit its tremendous potential.

But today, because of the capacity of airpower to mitigate and even overcome these obstacles, solutions are within reach. Though not sufficient to complete a full transformation by itself, airpower offers new opportunities. In comparison to the vast historical span addressed previously, airpower is a relative newcomer to Afghanistan. During the early twentieth century, Britain used World War I-tested air capabilities to extend its reach from India into Afghanistan. Through airpower, it achieved a high ground advantage during small scale operations that previously belonged exclusively to the mountain-dwelling tribes. From the air, the British conducted reconnaissance and delivered bombs that temporarily neutralized the traditional geographic advantage held by indigenous forces. No longer could Afghan conventional and irregular tribal forces fight in strongholds without concern about the skies above.

Airpower—War, Frontier Fighting, and the World's First NEO

The British demonstrated a number of important airpower functions in Afghanistan and in the North-West frontier during the early 1900s. During the Third Afghan War (1919), the British used coercive airpower to influence the decisions of the Afghan central government and tribal militias. Using World War I bombers, the British bombed Afghan cities and army positions. During the 1920s, the British used airpower in the Northwest frontier in an attempt to subdue tribal rebellions. They used aircraft to conduct reconnaissance, mobility, and coercive airpower missions in attempts to control the tribes with mixed results. In 1928, airpower rescued the British from political catastrophe in Afghanistan by successfully evacuating hundreds of civilians. Each of these mini-cases point to the effects that airpower had tactically and operationally in pursuit of state interests.

When looking for a near ideal example of operationally decisive airpower, the British use of airplanes during the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919 may come closest. During this war, they faced a conventional Afghan army and irregular tribal militias that spanned the mountainous border between Afghanistan and its Indian colony. Whereas prior to 1919, Britain could exert military influence only with ground forces, the advent of airpower gave the Empire another tool to use against Afghanistan's conventional forces and unified tribes. To counter those threats, a coercive air strategy proved effective at the operational and tactical levels of war. Because strategy is about achieving political conditions, a brief account of how the war came about provides useful context for airpower's contributions.

By treaty, since the second Anglo-Afghan War the British had controlled Afghanistan's external foreign policies in exchange for an annual subsidy and munitions shipments. In 1905, the Afghans and the British ratified the agreement again. However, by 1919 the Afghanistan government asked for a new arrangement and independence from British control. The British refused.

Rankling under the terms of that treaty and subsequent agreement, the new Afghan King Amanullah desired complete independence of Afghanistan from British influence and reclamation of disputed territory in the British India. Facing a potential domestic challenge to his power, the King also wanted to focus his countrymen's attention on an external threat. In 1919, conditions appeared advantageous for the King's plans.¹

The King hoped to take advantage of Britain's apparently weakened position across the Afghan border. The British faced unrest in the North-West frontier and mutinies in other parts of India. Furthermore, their best military forces had been pulled from India to the European battlefields of World War I. The King viewed this as an opportunity to exploit the British situation. His plan was to invade India, retake territorial possessions, and compel the British to free Afghanistan from the foreign policy arrangement.² Intending a surprise invasion, the King quietly prepared the state's instrument of force.

Historically, Afghanistan's military is comprised of a combination of a standing army and, most importantly, tribal militias. To prepare for battle, the King needed these forces ready and in position. Therefore, the King ordered the state's national army to position troops near the Durand line. The army established a camp at Dakka, an Afghan outpost close to the border, near the Khyber Pass. Additional troops camped in Jalalabad and Kandahar. Given ongoing unrest on the British side of the border, the King believed the British would see these troop positions as a responsible protective state action, rather than as an invasion force. To ready the second component of force, the King met with tribal chiefs to discuss the plan and invoked Jihad to form the tribal militias into a capability for the state's use. To ensure a combined effort, the King was adamant that no one take action until he gave word.³

The militias assembled, but no order to attack came. With forces arrayed on both sides of the border, however, a series of small actions took on a life of

¹ Rhea Talley Steward, *Fire in Afghanistan* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1973).

² Alfred L. P. Dennis, *The Foreign Policies of Soviet Russia* (New York,: E.P. Dutton & company, 1924), 254.

³ Steward, *Fire in Afghanistan*, 47.

their own.⁴ On May 3, 1919, Afghan soldiers embarked independently on a small incursion into British India, occupying an area disputed by the British and the Afghans called Bagh. From this location, the Afghans dammed up a stream that was the sole source of water for a British outpost. At the same time, tribesmen anxious to fight threatened British caravans and a military gunnery position near the Khyber Pass. The British, stretched thin, did not want to press a conflict. They were severely undermanned and supplied after WWI, and were straining under the weight of heavy policing duty, so they sent diplomatic cable to the King asking for calm. Amanullah responded that of course he sought independence from Britain, but insisted that he intended no threat against colonial India. His protestation rang hollow; raid on an Afghan post office in Peshawar revealed evidence that the King had plans for an imminent invasion. Hoping to maximize their military position, the British decided upon a preemptive strike.⁵

The strike against the Afghans was not entirely unexpected, but its means of delivery was. Airpower descended from the third dimension as the British maximized their asymmetric advantage: throughout the short war, airpower was *the* critical component of British military strategy, described below in three distinct operations.

On May 9, 1919, the British bombed Dakka, an Afghan outpost close to the Afghan-British Indian border, near the Khyber Pass.⁶ Dakka served as a depot for the Afghan army.⁷ The Royal Air Force targeted Afghan army forces and facilities, killing troops and tribesman, camels, and horses in the first ever air operation over Afghanistan.⁸ When the Afghans sent reinforcements to

⁴ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 241. The book quotes John F. Kennedy when inquiring whether his order got to all the airborne strategic air command bomber pilots: "There is always some son-of-a-bitch who doesn't get the word."

(which was taken from Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), p. 221.

⁵ Steward, *Fire in Afghanistan*, 52.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁷ David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

⁸ The British used a coercive air strategy of denial

Dakka, British aircraft struck again. The second bombardment killed an estimated six hundred men.⁹ As a result, many frustrated tribesmen abandoned their places and dispersed into the hills. Not all went well for the British. Because the aircraft had to fly low level through the hills, the tribesmen were able to shoot down three aircraft with small arms fire.¹⁰ Still, by targeting ground forces and supplies, the British employed a coercive air strategy of denial, specifically operational interdiction.¹¹

The second air operation targeted the city of Jalalabad. The Royal Air Force bombed the city for three days; on 17, 20, and 24 May.¹² The effects were immediate. One formation of the Afghan army dispersed in surprise. The bombardment drove scores of people away from the city, leaving it in chaos. Their exodus blocked the roads, hampering military ground movement, supply, and command and control.¹³ Tribes looted the city bazaar before retreating to the hills.¹⁴ The operation was so successful that city leaders and the central state government were convinced there was no chance at a military victory.¹⁵ This operation amounted to a successful coercive strategy of risk, where airpower is used to influence the adversaries' view of future costs.¹⁶

In the third distinct operation, on May 24, 1919, a single airplane flew over the Khyber Pass and bombed Kabul. A multi-engine Handley Page V.1500 dropped four 112-pound and sixteen 20-pound bombs on the city.¹⁷ The bombs landed around the King's palace and Afghan government buildings. Although the bombardment caused minor physical damage, and no one was

⁹ Edgar O'Ballance, *The Afghan Wars 1839-1992* (London: Brassey's, 1993), 516.

¹⁰ Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939*, 10.

¹¹ Robert Pape, *Bombing to Win: Airpower and Coercion in War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 77.

¹² Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939*, 9. Note: Several sources differ in the details about the number of engines involved

¹³ Steward, *Fire in Afghanistan*, 63.

¹⁴ Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939*, 9.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Pape, *Bombing to Win: Airpower and Coercion in War*.

¹⁷ Daniel Headrick, *People over Peoples: Technology, Environments, and Western Imperialism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 309.

hurt, the incident had a significant influence on subsequent events.¹⁸ The King had already requested an armistice with the British—after the effective Jalalabad bombing. Although frightening to the King and the armed forces, airpower had gone too far. It stiffened rather than weakened the King's resolve. After the Kabul bombing, the incensed King held a Jirga with the Mullahs who subsequently issued legal statements justifying Jihad against the British.¹⁹ The message promulgated throughout the tribal network and gave fanatical moral support to the deployed Afghan army as it faced the British.

Afghan general Nadir Khan advanced his Afghan army toward the frontier to pressure the British. Along the way, tribes from Waziristan and other areas joined his conventional force. Collectively, the General's army and the tribes compelled British forces to evacuate a crucial fort, called Thal. Now the British requested a negotiated settlement, and only the King's message to suspend operations caused Nadir's force to discontinue an advance on the retreating British.²⁰ The Anglo-Afghan war ended on 3 Jun 1919.²¹ On August 19, 1919, the Afghans and the British signed the Treaty of Rawalpindi as the official armistice between the two nations. The treaty gave the Afghan's full independence.

Early use of airpower prevented the soldiers and tribes from massing enough force to overwhelm British regulars. Operationally, airpower allowed small numbers of British forces to efficiently deal with Afghan ground troops and set the conditions to convince adversary leadership to reconsider the wisdom of future attacks. Of note, the use of airpower only provided *operational* success against the Afghans. Strategically, King Amanullah succeeded at meeting at least one political objective, which was to remove British control of their foreign policy. In this sense, the Third Afghan War is perceived as a loss for the British. But the loss must be considered minor.

¹⁸ Steward, *Fire in Afghanistan*, 68.

¹⁹ Rhea Talley Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1973), 65.

²⁰ Ibid., 67.

²¹ Fremont-Barnes, *The Anglo-Afghan Wars 1839-1919*, 85.

British forces in India were in no position to defend against a concerted Afghanistan attack without significant casualties, and such an attack could have increased domestic rebellions significantly. Without the asymmetric advantage of airpower, the outcome could have been vastly worse for the British.

The Third Afghan War had a significant downside for both Britain and the fledgling Afghan central government. Incipient nationalism prompted Afghan tribes on the British side of the frontier region to challenge colonial control. On their side of the border, desertions in the Afghan army made large numbers of new weapons available to the tribes, who would in turn eventually challenge the central government. Ultimately, the British had to expend time and resources attempting to quell rebellious tribes in India's Northwest region—though these regions were not lost to King Amanullah.

The Third Afghan War illustrated both a positive and negative influence of airpower. The bombing of Jalalabad caused the central Afghan government to question the efficacy of continuing the conflict and it certainly demoralized parts of the organized army. On the other hand, airplanes seemed to incite the government and tribes. It stimulated Islamic clerics to issue Fatwā calling for Jihad against the British.²² Only a credible central authority and a respected Afghan general were able to constrain the tribes. Historian Rhea Talley Stewart wrote: "The real danger to peace was not the proximity of Afghan tribes to British lines (the distance had been shortened to ten miles) but the British practice of sending over airplanes, which irritated the tribesmen."²³ British understanding of the tribes informed their approach to controlling their interests in the border region.

²² According to Freedictionary.com, a Fatwā is a legal opinion issued by an Islamic scholar.

²³ Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan*, 72.

Post-War Operations:

The North-West Frontier border region has always been integral to the security of Afghanistan, as well as to the territory known as Pakistan today. In the early twentieth century, the Durand Line demarcated the boundary between the independent state of Afghanistan and colonial British India. This line bisected an area containing an ethnically homogenous, yet politically differentiated tribal system. Along this line, both Afghanistan and Britain would face frequent uprisings.

During the Third Afghan War, the Afghan King had successfully incited the tribal people in the North-West Frontier region to join the fight against the British. Though the war officially ended in May 1919, once incited, the tribes along the border region remained hostile. From November to December 1919, the British used aircraft in daily bombings against a Pashtun tribe called Meshud. Dozens of airplanes dropped between two and seven tons of munitions daily. But independent air action was not enough to subdue the tribes. Only the combined presence of ground troops supported by air finally compelled the tribes to terms; but it was costly. The battle that finally brought a tenuous peace resulted in thousands of killed and injured on both sides, with the British alone losing 1,539 lives.²⁴

During the 1920 and 30s, the British also faced periodic raids of their territory from tribal gangs living in Waziristan. The need for tribal control dominated British policy as protecting the Indian subcontinent still held preeminence. At the time, the British Indian government adopted a policy of peaceful integration of the tribal areas. Civilian-led efforts focused on limiting the use of force in practice, although they relied upon dispersed ground units consisting of British military and police personnel to deter tribal rebellions.

²⁴ Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939*, 12. For the casualty static, see "Raf Timeline 1918-1929," Royal Air Force, <http://www.raf.mod.uk/history/raftimeline19181929.cfm>.

These forces were a constant physical presence in close proximity to and within tribal locations. Foot and vehicle patrols and civil works projects such as building roads further incentivized cooperation.²⁵

Airpower had a role in support of British policies, primarily in providing non-destructive benefits. The British discussed the use of airpower to better link government officials with the population by using the airplanes to transport government representatives to and from tribal locations. Aircraft were also used to survey the layout of tribal properties for use by police and civil projects. In general, the British recognized that airplanes provided the means to rapidly respond to situations before incidents with a tribal region got out of control.²⁶ Of course, airpower quickly became preeminent in gathering vital intelligence.

In this region, the use of military force, especially airpower, was tightly controlled by a British political agent. In general, civilians rejected Royal Air Force proposals to substitute more airpower for ground forces in the North-West Frontier. Aircraft were used sparingly to punish small pockets of tribesmen who opposed government policies. Learning lessons from the Third Afghan War, aircraft dropped leaflets on villages to give advanced notice of forthcoming bombings and gave the reasons why the bombings were being conducted and who were the intended recipients of aerial punishment. In other cases, aircraft were used to create an air blockade, such as to keep farmers from herding animals to pastures claimed by competing tribes or to prevent concentrations of logistical support for tribal raids into British India.²⁷ At times, the use of airpower was sufficient to deter or gain compliance from a wayward tribe.²⁸ During March and May 1925, independent air action by the Royal Air Force successfully suppressed rebellious tribes by strafing and

²⁵ Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939*, 94.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Andrew M. Roe, "Friends in High Places: Air Power on the North-West Frontier of India," *Air Power Review* 11 (2008): 44.

²⁸ Ibid.: 37.

bombing mountain strongholds.²⁹ In two months of action, the Royal Air Force reported two casualties (as compared to the 1,539 lost in the combined air and ground campaign of 1919).³⁰

Airpower clearly had physical and psychological effects on the tribes, and undoubtedly changed the tactical and strategic calculus of violence in the region, but not all kinetic types of air missions are described as success stories. Another perspective is offered by author Andrew M. Roe, who quotes a British Col F.S Keen in 1923: "By driving inhabitants of the bombarded area of their homes in a state of exasperation, dispersing them among neighboring clans and tribes with hatred in their hearts at what they consider 'unfair' methods of warfare, *bring about the exact political results which it is in our interests to avoid, viz, the permanent embitterment and alienation of the frontier tribes.*"³¹ This prescient quote maintains relevance in 2010 as the United States assesses its airpower use in Afghanistan and Pakistan. A modern strategist must determine whether this same mechanism of alienation exists today in Afghanistan and in Pakistan's North-West Frontier.

Coercive airpower was not the only function tested by the British in Afghanistan. As has been shown, mobility airpower was instrumental in stabilizing the region at a time of significantly decreasing available manpower. It was to have another major debut in 1928 when the Royal Air Force executed the world's first ever successful non-combatant airlift evacuation.

By the early 1920s, Britain had reestablished a small diplomatic presence in Afghanistan. At the same time, the legitimacy of the Afghan King and his government was steadily eroding. In result, the essential relationship between the central authority and the tribes degraded. History has shown that when this bond ruptures, an Afghan central government's days were numbered. Several actions by the King were exacerbating. Amanullah, in an effort to modernize, attempted to institute Western reforms into an Islamic nation and

²⁹ "Raf Timeline 1918-1929."

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Andrew Roe, *Waging War in Waziristan: The British Struggle in the Land of Bin Laden* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 132.

tried to convince the clerics to adopt Western ways of living. In a serious offense to their sensibilities, the Queen appeared in public unveiled. This seemingly small event compounded with other actions to further distance the King from the tribes. Most significantly, the King, under apparent pressure from the British, had broken Pashtunwali code by not honoring the asylum of Afghan fugitives on the run from British authorities. This failure permanently maligned the King's reputation with the tribes and yielded Fatwa against his authority. When unrest followed, the King negotiated an armistice with the rebellion's principal leader, making him a general in the Afghan Army. But the King subsequently violated the terms of agreement, causing the rebel leader to return to the mountains, gather the tribes, and attack Kabul in December of 1928. As the situation deteriorated, the British diplomatic mission came under direct threat by mobs of tribesmen.³²

Under dire and rapidly deteriorating conditions, the Royal Air Force performed the first ever non-combatant evacuation by airlift. Eighty-two airplanes successfully rescued 586 civilians trapped in Kabul and brought them safely to India.³³ To pull this operation off, the British moved aircraft from Iraq to join those in India. Not only did the evacuation add to airpower's increasing portfolio of quick-response actions, it demonstrated theater-wide flexibility to mass airpower at the right place and time. In a concurrent demonstration of aircraft flexibility, the British also used bombers as auxiliary transport aircraft.

Airpower's early contribution in Afghanistan and on the frontier provides useful insights. Though the scale of historical airpower pales in comparison to today's massive power projection capability, it still shows the decisive effect of mobility airpower over a land-locked country. Furthermore, the relationship between coercive airpower and human will was tested by early British airpower, revealing interesting and sometimes countervailing observations about the application of force. When attacking conventional military formations, coercive

³² Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan*.

³³ Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan*.

airpower affected human will. However, when used against the tribes, coercive airpower proved inconsistent. In some cases, the tribes sued for peace; in others, it hardened resolve. In the short-run, airpower appeared decisive tactically and operationally. But when one takes a longer, strategic view, *destructive* airpower did not make for a permanent peace. Throughout Britain's history on the subcontinent, the tribes continuously pursued their own interests, even when faced with threat from the skies. These lessons expose a relationship between force and the tribes that may be unique to Afghanistan and the border region. If the assumption holds that today's tribes differ little from those of the early 1900s, these stories are useful in assessing airpower in the modern context.

The British experience in Afghanistan sits at the extreme low end of the airpower scale. The relative numbers of aircraft involved and the extent of their use pale in comparison to the scale experienced later in the twentieth and now, twenty-first centuries. Within Afghanistan, small numbers of airplanes focused on specific ground targets were able to compel changes in the Afghan government and its military forces. In the frontiers, however, the British constrained airpower's destructive capacity, limiting it to localized punishment. Before most bombing, the Royal Air Force dropped leaflets. The British used these relatively small scale reprisals to deter future transgressions. Decades passed before Afghanistan experienced war with another nation-state.

On the other end of the airpower scale, seventy-one years after the successful British non-combatant occupation, the Soviet Union unleashed a scale and mode of airpower unseen in Afghanistan's history.

From Cold War to Fiery Rage: Soviet Airpower

The Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989) demonstrates the other extreme of force application. In this war, tools of force aided each opponent in the classic realist game of pursuing one's own interests at the

expense of others. It began as a one-sided contest pitting a technologically superior force against a primitive opponent endowed with nearly unlimited willpower. By the end, numerous outside sponsors had provided resources and technology to the Afghan resistance, effectively balancing out Soviet power. With its technological advantage countered, the edge tipped in favor of a rugged people in arms engaged in a successful insurgency. Airpower is central to the story of Soviet occupation and defeat.

With the departure of the British Empire from the Indian subcontinent in 1947, the Soviet Union became the only major power present in the Central Asian region. In the post-World War II environment, a bipolar world emerged with the United States and the Soviet Union squared off in a contest for global influence. During the 1950s, Afghanistan found itself once again a location for two great powers to contest each other; but the context was one of ideology and economic development instead of the incessant military rivalries that seemed to periodically consume Afghanistan. The Cold War contest in Afghanistan began with relatively meager involvement by the United States in the form of economic aid in the Southern portion of the country to build a host of civilian infrastructure projects. Likewise, the Soviet Union funded a variety of projects north of the Hindu Kush. Unlike the US, however, who was attempting to thwart its rival's expansion, the Soviet Union intended to bring Afghanistan into its sphere of influence and awaited opportunities to exert much greater control.³⁴

The Soviet Union found its chance in 1953. Despite its economic support to Afghanistan, the US was far more concerned with countering Soviet expansion into the wealthier states of Iran and Pakistan. If the Soviets could gain control of either of these states, they would have effective access to the Indian Ocean. But US military aid to Iran and Pakistan concerned the Afghan government. Well-equipped neighbors on two borders posed a security dilemma, especially with an ongoing dispute with Pakistan over Afghan claims

³⁴ Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban*, 1st ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002), 226.

to territory in Pakistan. Afghanistan appealed to the United States for military aid to replace World War I vintage airplanes and other hardware to balance the capabilities of its neighbors. When the Eisenhower administration rebuffed the request, Afghanistan's ruler turned to the Soviet Union for closer relations.³⁵

For the next twenty-six years, the Soviets steadily expanded their influence in Afghanistan. Their approach combined military and economic assistance. Though the Afghans benefitted, Soviet contributions aimed primarily at self-interested goals. Given the staunch anti-communist governments of Iran and Pakistan, influencing Afghanistan helped the Soviets achieve the best possible strategic advantage in the region. The Soviets delivered a variety of military aircraft and other equipment, and thousands of Afghan military personnel to train at Soviet military schools.³⁶ In this way, the Soviets encouraged full dependence on their weapons and tactics and socialized the officer corps to Soviet methods and personnel. During the 1960s, the Soviets built airbases that far exceeded the minimum required for the relatively small Afghan Air Force, and it completed a significant network of roads. Taking a long-view of regional influence, the infrastructure projects were designed for potential Soviet military use against Iran or Pakistan.³⁷ Financial investment in Afghanistan was sizeable for its day. By 1979, it came to nearly \$2.25 billion.³⁸

In addition to military and economic influence, the Soviets lent support to communist political units in the Afghan party system. Nations tend to like neighbors with the same form of government and prefer alliances with like-minded states. In 1978, a rebellion propelled the Soviet-supported Afghan communist party to the head of government. Though a communist

³⁵ Rosanne Klass, "The Great Game Revisited," in *Afghanistan: The Great Game Revisited*, ed. Rosanne Klass (New York: Freedom House, 1990), 4. See also: Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban*.

³⁶ Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban*, 226.

³⁷ Yossef Bodansky, "Soviet Military Involvement in Afghanistan " in *The Great Game Revisited*, ed. Rosanne Klass (New York: Freedom House, 1990).

³⁸ Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban*, 226.

Afghanistan could help the Soviets realize their strategic interests, without massive aid communism was unsustainable there; the ideology was an anathema to the federalist, individualist tendencies of Afghan society. When the fledgling government attempted to force classic Marxist reforms, traditional Afghan society summarily rejected them. In result, wide spread revolts rocked the country.³⁹

The Afghan communist government was a Soviet puppet and had entered into a series of agreements that gave the Soviets the legal pretext they needed to intervene. Soviet leadership also correctly perceived that the United States was unwilling to hamper an intervention within a well-recognized Soviet sphere of influence.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the Afghan revolts looked like minor insurrections that could easily be suppressed by Soviet might. Based on these assumptions, Soviet leadership ordered major action.

On Christmas Eve, 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Similar to the early British successes of the Anglo-Afghan wars of the nineteenth century, military operations unfolded swiftly with apparent success. The Soviet military machine captured major cities, airfields, and key roads. Aircraft lifted assault forces into Kabul for a surprise attack. Airpower provided a decisive advantage enabling the Soviets to rapidly insert Special Forces at geographic positions with surgical accuracy. Nonetheless, and despite the initial success, the Soviets became bogged down in a protracted war against a determined enemy ensconced in mountainous sanctuaries. Throughout their ten-year occupation, the Soviets used tactical air to augment ground operations, support an Afghan communist government, and fight against an insurgency.

Derived from their experience suppressing Muslim insurgencies in Central Asia, the Soviet approach was to “rapidly inflict massive collateral damage on the civilian infrastructure in order to erode popular support for the enemy.”⁴¹ The military pursued collateral damage with vigor.⁴² In line with

³⁹ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 235.

⁴¹ Bodansky, "Soviet Military Involvement in Afghanistan ", 234.

Soviet doctrine, airpower served as a brutal weapon of terror against the Afghan population. Essentially, it became the primary weapon in support of Soviet policy to depopulate rural Afghanistan. Bombers, fighter-bombers, and helicopters carried out massive bombardment against populated areas. Helicopter gunships mowed down villages and strafed tribesmen in the mountains. Helicopters dropped butter-fly mines to destroy farmland, interdict movements in valleys, and to surround villages being ravaged by aerial bombardment.⁴³ Reprisals were commonplace.⁴⁴ If a village was found to support insurgents, the Soviets would bomb it into oblivion.⁴⁵ As part of its depopulation policy, airpower targeted Afghanistan's agricultural base. Aerial bombers delivered incendiary munitions that burned crops and destroyed irrigation infrastructure.⁴⁶ Airplanes also dropped napalm on crops.⁴⁷ Helicopters shot up farmland and slaughtered livestock. Sustained bombing and other measures killed five million animals and reduced Afghanistan's staple food crops by 75-88 percent.⁴⁸ The once self-sustaining country has yet to recover.

The Soviets had significant experience in quelling Muslim insurgencies in Central Asia. Their practice was to deal the fatal blow through utter isolation from outside support. This was possible in internal regions, in less rugged terrain, where effective interdiction and brutal resolve combined with mass population migrations to complete the process. In Afghanistan, however, these conditions did not hold. The Soviets violated three important practices vital for successful counterinsurgency: deny sanctuary, cut off outside support, and

⁴² In contrast to the Soviet's emphasis on maximizing collateral damage, the American military general seeks to diminish it. Both the Soviets and the United States focused on the population. The Soviets aimed to destroy it, whereas the Americans seek to protect it. These facts should counter any comparisons of current United States' efforts to the Soviet Union's.

⁴³ David C Isby, *War in a Distant Country Afghanistan: Invasion and Resistance* (London: Arms and Amour, 1989), 64-65.

⁴⁴ Barnett Rubin, "Human Rights in Afghanistan," in *Afghanistan: The Great Game Revisted*, ed. Rosanne Klass (New York: Freedom House, 1990), 343-44.

⁴⁵ M. Siddieg Noorzoy, "Soviet Economic Interests and Policies in Afghanistan," in *Afghanistan-the Great Game Revisted*, ed. Rosanne Klass (New York: Freedom House, 1990), 83-84.

⁴⁶ Rubin, "Human Rights in Afghanistan," 343.

⁴⁷ Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban*.

⁴⁸ Noorzoy, "Soviet Economic Interests and Policies in Afghanistan," 84.

seal borders.⁴⁹ The Soviets failed to isolate the mujahedeen. Porous borders enabled routine transit to and from sanctuary in Pakistan. No attempts were made to strike at sanctuaries outside Afghanistan. Moreover, outside support flowed almost unhindered. The country became a proxy battleground for a number of nation-states ready and willing to balance the mighty Soviet Union. Pakistan provided sanctuary, training, and military equipment to resistance fighters. Saudi Arabia, Iran, China, and the United States channeled funding through Pakistan to the Mujahedeen. Ultimately, the US delivered a game-changing technology to Afghan resistance that fundamentally altered the character of the war.

The Soviet airpower advantage dissipated swiftly with the introduction of American Stinger missiles in 1986. When the Mujahedeen were able to contest air superiority, the Soviet position became untenable. No longer did the Soviet Helicopters operate unchallenged. The Stinger threat forced Soviet bombers to operate at much higher altitudes where their bombing became inaccurate.⁵⁰ Without airpower to cover their ground forces, the Soviets retreated to Kabul and the major cities. While the missiles could not give the Afghan fighters airpower, they took away the airpower advantage from the Soviets—and that proved to be enough.⁵¹

The Soviets faced another historically powerful weapon for which they had no counter. Like previous foreign occupiers, Soviet actions provoked religious leaders of the mujahedeen to call for Jihad. As an ideological weapon, Jihad unified loosely confederated clans and tribes into a formidable fighting force. Jihad also appealed to foreign fighters who travelled to Afghanistan and joined indigenous people against the Soviet Union. Geography, outside support

⁴⁹ Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," 10.

⁵⁰ Isby, *War in a Distant Country Afghanistan: Invasion and Resistance*, 62.

⁵¹ Diego Cordovez, *Out of Afghanistan: The inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc, 1995), 199. Note: Cordovez provides evidence that Stinger missiles did not cause the greatest losses of Soviet airpower. He argues that conventional wisdom that Stinger's turned the tide of the war may be inaccurate. The view is presented here for completeness.

from Soviet competitors, Jihad, and military genius of mujahedeen commanders conspired against the Soviet Union.

The Afghan insurgency met nearly all the criteria identified by Carl Von Clausewitz for an effective general uprising. In Book Six, Clausewitz offered two conditions especially relevant: “The national character must be suited to that type of war,” and, “The country must be rough and inaccessible, because of mountains or forests, marshes, or the local methods of cultivation.”⁵² In the context of Afghanistan, airpower provided the Soviets the ability to rapidly mass power, but could not completely overcome Afghanistan’s rugged geography nor alter the timeless character of Afghanistan’s martial culture. Consequently, a conventionally trained Soviet force existed in a state of tension with a fierce collective of warrior tribes. As Clausewitz stated “This tension will either gradually relax, if the insurgency is suppressed in some places and slowly burns itself out in other, or else it will build up to a crisis: a general conflagration closes in on the enemy, driving him out of the country before he is faced with total destruction.”⁵³ Categorically, an unyielding insurgent fire engulfed the Soviets. Costs mounted. After ten years, 13,310 dead, 35,478 wounded, billions of rubles, and millions of displaced Afghans, the Soviet leadership opted to withdraw.⁵⁴ They left behind a power vacuum.

In the wake of the 1989 withdrawal, a bloody civil war erupted in Afghanistan. With no foreign occupier to unify them in common cause, the loose confederation of tribal groups disbanded and turned on each other. New indigenous groups vied for supremacy. The Northern Alliance and the Taliban became paired against one another. Outside nation-states assessed the internal balance of Afghanistan and aligned with one of the warring sides hoping to shift regional conditions to their advantage. Abandoned by the United States shortly after Soviet withdrawal, Pakistan fueled the fundamentalist Taliban. India, Iran, and Russia sponsored their opponents.

⁵² Clausewitz, *On War*, 480.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Isby, *War in a Distant Country Afghanistan: Invasion and Resistance*, 62.

Thus, the Great Game started again. Regional powers envisioned an Afghanistan favorable to their self interest. The Afghan Civil War culminated with the emergence of the Taliban as the dominant political force. By 2001, it controlled most of Afghanistan. The country's fundamentalist environment enabled a terrorist safe haven to thrive. Al-Qaeda seized the opportunity to churn out true believers bent on Western destruction. Twelve years after the Soviet defeat, the 11 September attacks on United States soil underscored the danger posed by Afghanistan's safe havens. In response to the attack, the American eagle gripped arrows and soared across the globe.

American Airpower Strategies in Afghanistan

The United States intervention in Afghanistan demonstrated America's modern way of war—a way heavily reliant upon airpower. This proven method relied on deadly fighting power based on highly advanced technology and relatively small numbers of United States ground forces. In 2001, this fighting power plus indigenous Northern Alliance militias overwhelmed the Taliban in what seemed to be a major step towards decisive strategic victory.⁵⁵ Within months, the United Nations worked with Afghan elites to select an interim Afghan leader favorable to United States, regional actors, and Afghan political interests. Confident of this political course and assuming the Taliban and al-Qaeda were beaten, America shifted attention and resources to Iraq. The apparent strategic victory in Afghanistan, enabled by America's way of war, was short-lived.

Afghanistan's historical pattern repeated. Insurgency followed swift operational victory. From 2006 to 2009, the Taliban insurgency reestablished control in rural areas of the country. The insurgent phase of the conflict rocked a foundation of belief based on previous operational successes in which airpower was a dominant instrument. In the absence of sufficient ground

⁵⁵ Colin S. Gray and Army War College (U.S.). Strategic Studies Institute., *Defining and Achieving Decisive Victory* ([Carlisle Barracks, PA]: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2002). Gray defines decisive as the degree to which political conditions are achieved.

forces to protect the population, the United States increased its reliance on airpower as the primary means of force to strike insurgents. As it had proven for the British and Soviets, airpower was a dual-edged sword that both helped and hurt America's strategy.

Ground forces often found themselves in situations that required close-air-support. In 2008, coalition aircraft flew 13,802 close-air-support missions and dropped 2,983 bombs, nearly a 30% increase over 2007 numbers.⁵⁶ In some cases, the Taliban lured coalition forces into calling airstrikes on buildings where they had placed human shields.⁵⁷ Civilian casualties fueled insurgent propaganda which the Taliban used to alienate the coalition from the Afghan population and to undermine the Afghan central government. Collateral damage caused by airpower strikes transformed reluctant tribal members into mortal enemies of America.

Consequently, improper use of the air instrument became a top strategic consideration. President Karzai expressed deep concern that civilian casualties were undermining the central government.⁵⁸ Within hours of winning the US presidential election, President Obama received a phone call from Karzai who demanded an end to airstrikes that killed civilians in his country.⁵⁹ Secretary Gates stated publically that the US would review its use of airpower in Afghanistan. This followed Ambassador Eikenberry's promise to Afghan survivors that the US would change its airpower tactics to severely restrict civilian casualties.⁶⁰ Collateral damage, Taliban momentum, and the continuing cost of the war compelled major debate over the national strategy.

Several different schools of thought permeated strategic discussions. Military commanders proposed more boots on the ground and an emphasis on

⁵⁶ Michaels Jim, "Airstrikes in Afghanistan Increase 31% During 2008," *USA TODAY* 2008.

⁵⁷ Rachel Morarjee, "Air War Costs Nato Afghan Supporters ; an Increase in Air Strikes Has Led to More Innocent Deaths as Taliban Fighters Use Civilians as Human Shields," *The Christian Science Monitor* 2006.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Howard LaFranchi, "Obama's New Tone Abroad," *The Christian Science Monitor* 2008.

⁶⁰ http://articles.sfgate.com/2009-05-20/news/17202732_1_civilian-deaths-civilian-casualties-president-hamid-karzai

classic counterinsurgency with a focus on the population. Vice President Biden countered with a proposal to leave the ground forces at the same level, but to rely more heavily on drone strikes. At the end of the debate, President Obama opted for the course proposed by Gen McChrystal.

In stark contrast to the Soviet approach, Gen McChrystal made the *protection of the population* the centerpiece of America's strategy. His initiatives included restrictions on the use of force in Afghanistan. He placed constraints on special operations raids, on ground force methods in village clearing, and most significantly on kinetic airpower. In 2009, reports claimed a 50% reduction in close-air-support missions versus 2008 figures.⁶¹ On 22 Feb 2010, General McChrystal went on Afghan national television to apologize for air strikes that killed 24 civilians, including women and children.⁶²

McChrystal's approach required a change in thinking by the American military about the use of force in the context of Afghanistan. The new strategy focuses on rejuvenation of Afghan society from resurrecting agriculture to road building. The American strategy now leverages the existing social organizing structure inherent to Afghanistan. It accounts for tribal decision-making, Islamic norms, and other tribal customs that have existed for thousands of years. Operation Majrah demonstrated the change. Before launching the operation, the Coalition and the central government approached tribal elders to gain their approval prior to beginning. In so doing, the Coalition enhanced its legitimacy by conducting the operation with local buy-in and in a manner acceptable to the tribal leaders. These types of actions strengthen the connection between the central government and the tribes.

The new strategy also addresses the Taliban and Al Qaeda sanctuaries in Pakistan. History shows that foreign interventions completely depend for success upon the ungoverned, unconquered tribes that overlap the

⁶¹ Jim Michaels, "Airstrikes in Afghanistan Drop by Almost Half," *USA TODAY* 2009.

⁶² "U.S. commander apologizes on Afghan TV McChrystal to Regain Trust after Airstrike Kills 21 Civilians" http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/35534294/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/

Afghanistan-Pakistan border. With American help and a new existential threat inside its country, Pakistan has conducted operations in parts of the North-West Frontier. Evidence suggests that the Taliban is not a popular movement in these sanctuaries. Since 2002, the Taliban have killed several hundred Pashtun Tribal leaders in the frontier. In March 2010, seven hundred tribal leaders demanded that the Pakistan army get more aggressive in clearing the Taliban out of their homeland.⁶³

Implications

Airpower as a destructive tool is problematic in the context of Afghanistan. At the tactical and operational levels, kinetic airpower has enabled small numbers of personnel to keep insurgents from overrunning their positions. At the strategic level, the destructive form of airpower has complicated strategy. In the British case, coercive airpower worked against fielded conventional forces and a central authority, but it did not deter the tribes from active rebellion. On the contrary, its indiscriminate use may have helped provoke opposition. In the frontiers, the British used non-kinetic airpower as part of a wider civilian effort to build relationships with the tribes. When airpower was used to punish the tribes, the British attempted to limit the killing of people. In the Soviet case, the use of airpower was brutally efficient in the early stages of operations, but ineffective in producing a favorable strategic outcome. The Soviet use of destructive airpower did not diminish the willpower of the tribes—to the contrary, it hardened.

The British and Soviet experiences with airpower in Afghanistan represents two ends of a continuum of utility and value. Both shed light on the proper use of airpower in Afghanistan today. Most of airpower's history in Afghanistan is about the application of force—too little is about the enabling capacities it inherently holds.

⁶³ Mehsud Rehmat, "Pakistani Tribes Press Army to Step up against Taliban," *Wall Street Journal (Online)*.

Airpower is a symbolic and real source of a national power. In the context of Afghanistan, historical lessons support Gen Stanley McChrystal's powerful statement: "Airpower contains the seeds of our own destruction if we do not use it responsibly—we can lose this fight."⁶⁴ The next chapter provides recommendations about the responsible uses of airpower in the context of Afghanistan.

⁶⁴ Filkins Dexter, "U.S. Toughens Airstrike Policy in Afghanistan," *New York Times* 2009.

Chapter 5

Responsible Airpower in Afghanistan

Non Sibi Sed Patriae -- Not for self, but for country

Inscribed on the Chapel Doors of the
United States Naval Academy

General McChrystal's statement at the end of the last chapter contains a challenge for airpower advocates—what is *responsible* use of airpower? To the extent that it applies to the strategic context and historical experiences of Afghanistan, this chapter attempts to answer that question.

Responsible Airpower: Restrain Destructive Force

A responsible air strategy must reduce the risk of civilian casualties. The first step is proper identification of targets and enhanced targeting precision. Thus responsible airpower is inextricable from Information Operations. Collateral damage resulting from air strikes erodes support at the strategic level from all actors—domestic and foreign. It can move tribes away from supporting the central government. It can be used by the mujahidin in propaganda that not only reduces support for American actions but increases foreign recruitment of combatants. The enemy is fully aware of this effect, and employs deception techniques that invite strikes on targets that, unknown to the US at the time, harbor civilians. The enemy leverages information operations by explaining their version of a bombing event that erodes the legitimacy of the Afghan government and defines US and coalition forces as a permanently occupying force. All this works against US interests, but it does not mean America is without recourse. Rather than refrain from strikes or overly contain kinetic action, US and Afghan forces should adopt changes in

strike tactics, increases in information operations, and expansion of investment in smaller precision strike munitions.

An Afghanistan strategist must factor an important historical constant when considering the responsible use of airpower. When foreign military forces committed acts that violated Islamic values or Pashtunwali code, tribal leaders or the central authority invoked or widened Jihad. When Jihad is called, tribal groups have coalesced and made conditions so bad for foreign troops that their forces have had to withdraw. The types of acts that lead to Jihad include: breaking a commitment, threatening a way of life, and indiscriminate use of force. The destructive use of airpower has a particularly corrosive history by generating actual and perceived grievances.

Therefore, a responsible air strategy limits significantly the use of air strikes during military operations. Though this may increase the risk to Coalition ground forces and expand the time required to complete military missions, constraining airpower serves several purposes. First, it reduces opportunities for collateral damage (especially civilians), disproportionate destruction of property, and unnecessary killing of insurgents. All of these fuel insurgency through what David Kilcullen refers to as the accidental guerilla syndrome.¹ This syndrome manifests when heavy-handed intervention generates grievances, alienation, and desires for revenge in the affected population. If the enemy of my enemy is my friend, as the saying goes, the Afghan population may choose to join the Taliban—not on the attractiveness of the Taliban’s ideology, but rather on a rejection of what appears to be a malevolent foreign presence.

Airstrikes provide the impetus for real grievances. Though they may eliminate insurgents, they seem just as often to create many more insurgents based on the tribal norms for revenge. In this light, the United States should be especially careful in its use of drone strikes in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier. Just as the British warned, decapitation and punishment strikes

¹ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

may result in collateral damage that could alienate Pashtun tribal members. Rather than deter them from joining Jihad in Afghanistan, these strikes may embolden them to do so or even to challenge the Pakistan government. The latter event, should a popular revolt topple the currently friendly government, would effectively isolate US forces in Afghanistan—and that would be a disaster.

A responsible strategy in Afghanistan does not put ground forces deliberately in situations where they need massive close-air support. At the operational and tactical levels of war, this requires prudent thinking about how ground forces are used and what ground movements might look like to the Afghan population. Many of the older generation of tribal people remember the operational signature of the Soviet Union. Memories of Soviet brutality inform their perceptions and judgments about today's force; to them it is just a different uniform. The Coalition should not present an operational ground signature that resembles the Soviet Union. Doing so can provoke the population, especially the tribes, into action.

To illustrate the case, some of the most heroic United States missions have involved large airstrikes that killed hundreds. These missions followed a similar pattern. A convoy of a few coalition trucks with a small number of troops moved along a road towards a village. No prior communication occurred to let the tribes know the team was coming. The signature appeared menacing to the population. In response, the local people, whether insurgent or militia, gathered arms and threatened or ambushed the teams. Calling in the decisive capabilities of airpower, the teams tactically devastated the insurgents and destroyed buildings and other property. These missions involved extraordinary valor and in most cases were appropriate to assigned operational tasks. The obvious question must be asked: why were the troops were put in these situations at all?²

² Authors experience reviewing OEF mission results.

Limiting air strikes will also diminish the amount of new material available for use in insurgent propaganda. Bruce Hoffman explains that terrorist organizations use propaganda to recruit new members, develop sympathy and support, and undermine the legitimacy of their adversary.³ During the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, Israel's air strikes killed civilians and damaged urban areas disproportionately. Hezbollah used these results to bolster its propaganda. With biased information feeds to go on, international press reports generated outrage against Israel's methods throughout the globe.⁴ Similarly, airpower is an important theme in Taliban propaganda.⁵ They use images of collateral damage in their internet videos. They use the specter of inhuman—therefore, to them, immoral—Predator drone strikes to rally people against the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan. A responsible use of airpower can deny this opportunity to the Taliban by accepting the risk of diminished close air support.

A responsible strategy must also emphasize ways to protect the airpower instrument. Fortunately, the Taliban organization does not possess the physical capability to seriously contest the air. During the Soviet occupation, resistance fighters successfully neutralized the Soviet's airpower advantage using stinger ground-to-air missiles. Although the Taliban can sporadically engage American aircraft and damage ground facilities, its strategic capability in this regard is extremely limited. But physical contestation is not the only means to render airpower ineffective. Today's adversary uses information operations to undermine the *legitimacy* of airpower use and the *credibility* of foreign military presence.⁶ The Taliban contests airpower on moral grounds.

The Taliban have created narratives about how the United States uses airpower immorally. Fabricated information creates new shared meanings

³ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (Columbia University Press, 2006).

⁴ Arkin, *Divining Victory : Airpower in the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War*.

⁵ Jason Motlagh, "Why the Taliban Is Winning the Propaganda War," *Time* (May 3, 2009), <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1895496,00.html>.

⁶ Thomas Elkjer Nissen, "The Taliban's Information Warfare: A Comparative Analysis of Nato Information Operations (Info Ops) and Taliban Information Activities," (Royal Danish Defense College, 2007).

about airpower action that can adversely affect Coalition strategy. The adversary perpetuates these narratives relatively uncontested in cyber-sanctuaries. For example, Jihad websites provide stunning images of birth defects attributed to what they claim are American-made depleted uranium rounds delivered by airpower.⁷ The effect is to incite the Pashtuns and a wider Islamic audience against Western presence in Afghanistan. It does not matter that no such ordinance is in use in Afghanistan, that the charges are completely fabricated, if they go unchallenged. Responding to these narratives, if they deserve to be challenged, requires greater attention in cyberspace, for the purposes of protecting airpower. Stronger cyber-defense is needed. Sea power theorist Julian Corbett asserted that if one lacks the capability to win command of the domain, one should nevertheless dispute the domain.⁸ The American strategy should be to vigorously contest cyberspace, in those blogs, on those websites, to introduce positive narratives about airpower. Tactical actions might include the posting of hundreds of videos and blogs to a large number of Jihad websites with the objective of providing alternate views and truthful information. The Coalition must aggressively contest these cyber-sanctuaries, too.

More than responding to propaganda charges and narratives is required. A responsible use of airpower includes proactive information operations. General McChrystal helps with the strategic communications when he's apologized for the strikes. Airpower becomes an effective mechanism for information operations every time airpower delivers government officials to see their rural public; when it is used to rotate troops home to their villages from lengthy deployments; or when it provides humanitarian support. It happens when Afghans see their own Afghan National Air corps doing the heavy work rather than foreign aircraft.

⁷ Authors research on Islamic extremist websites.

⁸ Jullian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, ed. John B Hattendorf and Wayne P. Hughes, *The Classics of Sea Power* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press), 209-10.

Strategic Power Projection & Mobility Airpower

American airpower alters the balance of power in the region. Its global reach makes it *possible* for the United States to project power to Afghanistan. No other nation has been able to deliver this degree of massed power over such distance. Air mobility assets, such as the C-17, C-5, the C-130, and commercial lift capabilities provide the means to move personnel and material to a landlocked nation. Between 2001 and 2010, this strategic capability has moved 1.65 million people and 2.4 billion pounds of logistical support.⁹ While smaller than then the Berlin airlift, the distances involved and infrastructure overcome are on a vastly different scale, and these figures represent an equivalent heroic effort.

To enhance the responsible use of airpower, an air-centric strategy would place greater emphasis on air mobility in logistics. Airpower helps supply 100,000 American troops stationed in a landlocked country, 7,000 miles away, behind enemy lines. This contribution is significant, because overland supply lines pass through high risk territory. Approximately 75% of non-lethal supplies travel from Karachi through Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province to the Khyber Pass. Today, the entire supply line is vulnerable, mostly due to political pressure on the Pakistani government to shut it down.¹⁰ In December 2008, 10,000 protesters rallied in Islamabad demanding that the government close the NATO supply route.¹¹ Physical security is a constant problem. Insurgents have attacked the supply line multiple times. In 2009, a Taliban attack on a key bridge temporarily interrupted the supply artery.¹² Greater emphasis on mobility airpower would allow the Coalition to bypass the much more dangerous ground lines of communication. While daunting, senior airmen have thought through this potential challenge. In 2009, the

⁹ Data was provided by the 618th Tanker Airlift Control Center DATA DIVISION 618 TACC/XOND. The numbers reflect movement of personnel and material between 11 Sep 01 and 10 May 2010.

¹⁰ Kronstadt, "Pakistan-U.S. Relations," (Congressional Research Service, 2009).

¹¹ "10,000 Urge Pakistan to Cut US-Nato Supply Line," *Associated Press*, December 18 2008.

¹² Bob Roggio, "Taliban Attack Nato Supply Lines in Northwest Pakistan", *The Long War Journal* (2009).

Commander of United States Transportation Command, Gen Duncan McNabb, explained that America was prepared to execute a Berlin-airlift into Afghanistan if needed.¹³

Mobility Airpower—connecting the Central Government to the Tribes

The Afghan central authority must have strong linkages to the Afghan population, most importantly to the tribes, if it is to maintain legitimacy. When linkages are weak, the tribal groups have united against the central government. In order to sustain itself, the central authority must have the military means either from a standing army, tribal militias, or (ideally) both. Airpower can have a role in each of these.

A responsible use of airpower involves using airpower to solve major retention issues in the Afghan National Army. Morale issues stem from an inefficient leave program and dangerous movement by roads.¹⁴ As a result, soldiers desiring to connect with their families tend to desert. In 2009, the Afghan army and police desertion rates were 25% and 18% respectively.¹⁵ During May 2009, the Afghan army faced an absent without leave (AWOL) rate ranging from 9% to 12%.¹⁶ To put these figures in perspective, United States military rates for desertion averaged 3.4% during the Vietnam War and 4.6% during World War II.¹⁷ The Army might mitigate this problem through expanded use of its aviation assets, fixed wing and helicopters, to rotate personnel to and from their home districts for leave. Air mobility in this manner can help the Afghan Army with morale and retention issues.

High AWOL rates reflect low morale. Senior airman confirmed that the AWOL rates goes up when Afghan soldiers lack the means to get back home.

¹³ Walter Pincus, "General Urges Confidence in Ability to Supply Troops in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, *The (DC)* 2009.

¹⁴ Information came from a personal discussion with expert who assessed the morale of the Afghan military.

¹⁵ "Defeating Desertion," <http://www.strategypage.com/htmw/htatrit/20100308.aspx>.

¹⁶ President of the United States, "Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan and United States. Plan for Sustaining the Afghanistan National Security Forces," (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2010).

¹⁷ Is something missing here?"Defeating Desertion." "Defeating Desertion."

Because reliable, quick transportation does not exist, the soldiers refuse to wait, and they desert. The problem is then compounded by a confusion of cause and effect. Some Afghan soldiers have not taken leave in over three years because their commanders fear they would desert after returning home.¹⁸ A serious complication is the rugged terrain and threat from insurgents. These make ground transportation impractical in the implementation of leave. It simply takes too long to transport troops from one side of the country to the other. With a reliable air transport capability, a proper leave program can be established. Afghan soldiers can reconnect with their families and get much needed rest and relaxation in a timely fashion. Morale and public support should increase, and the efficiency and effectiveness of indigenous troops will be bolstered. Mobility airpower can provide that edge.

A responsible AF strategy needs to complement Gen McChrystal's approach in Afghanistan. America's method has changed from an economy-of-force, holding operation to a more robust, classic counterinsurgency model that will have a strategic end-state of an Afghan government capable of providing security, essential services, economic growth, a credible system of justice, and the means to ensure the peaceful resolution of political disputes. It must also ensure that the insurgent threat from Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters is reduced to a level manageable by Afghan forces. To help achieve this, the USAF needs to focus on how best to support operations that provide security for local provinces while it conducts broader stability and reconstruction operations, builds partner capacity so Afghan Air Forces are capable of applying airpower to meet security challenges, and helps build the Afghan government's legitimacy in the eyes of the population.

¹⁸ Leon Wolff, *In Flanders Fields: The 1917 Campaign* (New York: Time Inc, 1967), pp. 78-102, offers a discussion of the disastrous Spring 1917 Nivelle Offensive that triggered the mutinies. It notes that the number one demand of the mutineers was for regular leave, but also points out that the main trigger for the mutinies was the French Army's persistent launching of futile offensive operations. Alastair Horne's *The Price of Glory* (which you read in 601) talks a little about leave in the French army on page 64. He states that the French had no organized leave policy at all until 1915, and it was very sporadic thereafter.

The US and coalition forces should accomplish this shift and expansion of the use of airpower with a complementing information campaign to highlight how airpower helps the Afghan people. The AF can support this shift in focus along four lines of operation:

1. Airpower can help in reconstruction efforts. The Air Force needs to surge multi-role mobility by applying direct support with light and medium mobility to include short take off and land (STOL) fixed and rotary wing aircraft to extend the reach and freedom of maneuver by three entities: the Afghan military and security forces; US & Coalition forces; and the twenty-six Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) that work to build up infrastructure.
2. Air mobility can provide the rapid movement of government leaders, humanitarian supplies, medical evacuation, security forces, and essential sustainment cargo that would greatly enhance the overall effectiveness of the Afghan government. President Karzai stated publicly on 20 May 2009 that his government will build schools, clinics, and houses for affected Afghan people. The air strategy should seek to assist the Afghan military and security forces and the Provincial Reconstruction Teams to accomplish these types of tasks safely and quickly by getting personnel off the roads. Mountainous terrain, poor roads and infrastructure, and long distances over remote areas complicate movement of these teams and hinder the PRT's pace and mission. Air mobility support to these teams is critical to providing services to the population that will convince them of the government's intent and capability to sustain its governance responsibilities and turn them against the insurgents.
3. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) have had little to no access to United States, Coalition, or Afghan air mobility assets. Freedom of maneuver is key to successful PRT work. Air mobility would enable PRT members get away from the forward operating base

and into remote sites where the reconstruction projects are. One PRT commander explained that his team drove six hours by convoy from base to a work site, over a poor road, through enemy choke points.¹⁹ Historically, Mujahidin doctrine calls for ambushing convoys through mountain passes.²⁰ Today, they plant Improvised Explosive Devices on the road to blow up PRT vehicles upon their return. Providing air support to PRTs will save lives, getting them off the roads and into the air, thereby minimizing exposure to enemy weapons, especially IEDs—the largest killer of United States, Coalition, and Afghan military and security forces.²¹ In the case described above, air mobility would reduce a 6-hour commute to 25-30 minutes.

4. The Afghan people should view the work by Coalition and interagency Provincial Reconstruction Teams as Afghan government-influenced efforts to rebuild the country. Airpower can help achieve this point of view by bringing senior US and coalition leaders and especially Afghan government officials quickly and safely out to the work sites where they can engage with the people directly. Quality assurance and quality control of construction work can be enhanced if civil engineers and project managers can safely get out to remote project sites where they can interact with those Afghan personnel engaged in construction efforts. Light mobility is the way to make this happen. These PRTs should have dedicated light and medium fixed and rotary wing assets. Build them, buy them, lease them, borrow them, but get these in theater rapidly.

¹⁹ Interview with Col William Andersen.

²⁰ Need something hereSite Soviet experience.

²¹ Need something hereCite from statistical data.

This same mobility lift could also be used for support missions that require quick reaction times. For example, it could be used to decrease the medical response time from injury to treatment in Afghanistan, as was done in Iraq, and decrease the time to respond to Troops-in-Contact anywhere in the country. Similar metrics such as movement of supplies and personnel would show trends towards meeting objectives. As with the Army Air Corps' support of the island-hopping Pacific Campaign during WWII, the US and Afghan government may have to rapidly build infrastructure (i.e., small landing strips, roads) to aid the air mobility mission. In the PRT convoy example above, it was the quality of the road that made the trip last 6 hours.²² Building this type of infrastructure would provide the Afghan government a means to move supplies and forces around the country when the United States finally withdraws.

Armed Overwatch—Intelligence, Surveillance, & Reconnaissance

The air strategy should surge more Intelligence, Surveillance, & Reconnaissance (ISR) to Afghanistan for use both there and over Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Ground forces, both Afghan and coalition, have an insatiable demand for manned and unmanned ISR. Finding the enemy, tracking the enemy, and understanding the complex battle space are critical in counterinsurgency operations. The Air Force's effort to surge manned ISR with Project Liberty MC-12s and the increased use of UAVs in Iraq are excellent models to follow, but there are other ways to generate more ISR support while involving the air assets of other nations.

The USAF could invest in or convince coalition partners to invest in modifications to a variety of small aircraft belonging to United States, Coalition, and Afghan forces to better perform the ISR mission. The USAF should continue to move ahead with initiatives to increase the number of Predator and MQ-9 Reaper orbits, but also invest heavily in small UAV technology. These

²² The PRT reports that up-armored vehicles are often not able to drive well on these roads either.

systems feed real-time video to tactical operations centers for command decisions on whether to strike. They also provide video for exploitation.

Small UAVs and the hundreds of new systems being developed now need to be exploited. Exploitation means detailed examination of the video for an understanding of behavior—where individuals go, who they meet with, what they do. COIN-focused processing, exploitation, and dissemination (PED) can aid ground team decision making through better understanding of enemy behavior. It can be used to monitor developments in remote areas of Afghanistan, along the border, and other locations of interest. Members of the Afghan National Police, Afghan National Army, and in some cases members of tribes should be present in these PED cells. A forward PED element could leverage local tribal expertise to improve the Afghan military's use of ISR, thereby growing the indigenous capability to conduct their own missions.

Building Afghan Capacity

A responsible use of airpower means continuing to build the Afghan Air Force. The air strategy should emphasize air advisors. In a counterinsurgency fight, the fighting one does by, with, and through the host government is more important than the fighting done by oneself. Although US airpower will retain the capability as needed to support US, Coalition, and Afghan ground forces, the USAF must focus on building the capability and capacity of the Afghan Air Force. The USAF does have an expeditionary wing task force that is responsible for building the Afghan National Army Air Corps to provide airpower support to security forces. The members of the USAF's task force are considered mentors, not advisors. The difference is that advisors would deploy regularly with Afghan forces to advise, train, and assist during missions. This organization has 186 US military personnel assigned. The Afghans operate 35 aircraft, including Mi-17, Mi-35, An-32, An-26 and soon, the C-27A. On 25

February 2010, the first Afghan pilot graduated from C-27A flight school.²³ Three others are in the pipeline.

The US should accelerate the air mobility that the Afghans can provide for themselves. By investing now to produce more, better-trained mentors and changing employment, the US can accelerate the building of capability and capacity in the Afghan Air Corps. One PRT commander noted that despite daily requests, his team only received air support four times in a one-year time frame—one by US air, and the other three in helicopters flown by the Afghan national army. He said that the three times they were flown by the Afghan national army was the best case scenario, in that Afghans begin to see their own government doing the mission.

The AF should also provide rotary and fixed wing mentors that are language trained, culturally aware, and experts on the counterinsurgency fight raging in Afghanistan. Deploying US airmen for this mission, assisting their Afghan partners to more effectively apply airpower capabilities to meet irregular challenges, is the key to success. The US needs to put the appropriate level of effort into this decisive operation and institutionalize this approach rather than continue an ad-hoc arrangement. The Afghan Air Corps needs its own close air support capabilities to support their ground security forces. The US should surge efforts to get their pilots up to speed, facilitate the purchase of “right-tech” light attack aircraft, and assist them with the employment of these capabilities. The timeline to make Afghan strike missions a reality must be accelerated.

Senior Airmen: From the Boardroom and onto the Battlefield

World events and the significance of airpower demand bold changes in how America employs its top Air Force generals. Almost all three- and four-star Air Force generals serve in “organize, train, and equip” jobs rather than in

²³ “Airmen train Afghan National Army Air Corps’ first C-27 pilot
“<http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123192066>

the combat zone where they can provide critical air-minded expertise. One- and two-star generals do one-year tours in Afghanistan, get credit for overseas experience, and then report to positions where their experience no longer directly shapes war efforts. Instead, the senior-most and best experienced Airmen build budgets, oversee weapon systems procurement, and organize staffs in the Pentagon and at major command headquarters. Though seasoned generals prove useful navigating complex stateside bureaucracies, America could better use them as leaders in combat. Current wartime commitments require glass-breaking measures to turn the institution on its head. To give the United States the best chance of success in Afghanistan, three changes in Air Force general officer assignments are required.

First, Congress should elevate the Air Force Central Command Commander to four-star rank. A four-star air position will provide the right level of leadership to optimize airpower's contribution to two wars. A four-star will produce greater responsiveness from regional partners in securing overflight and basing agreements. The rank will improve the interaction between the senior airman in theater and his or her US Army counterparts. Consider that today, only one three-star airman works with three warfighting four-stars in US Central Command. This nationally important theater requires generals of the highest rank and skill to produce strategic victory. To increase the likelihood of success, Congress should allocate an Air Force four-star position posthaste.

Second, to maximize American use of airpower in Afghanistan, the Secretary of Defense should adopt the approach that proved successful during World War II. Pick and co-locate senior Army and Air Force generals whose personalities, experience, and mutual trust produce strategic and operational results. In World War II, General Douglas MacArthur had George Kenney, and General Omar Bradley had Pete Quesada; in the Gulf War, General Schwarzkopf had Chuck Horner. Today's Army commanders need *their* Airmen. Just as historic Army-Air Force pairs dominated the battle space of Europe and the Pacific, the same can happen today in Central Asia.

Therefore, the Secretary of Defense should assign a three-star airman to Afghanistan. The right three-star airman in Afghanistan could develop a strong relationship with the top Army general through daily battlefield interaction. Army culture, particularly its special operations culture that General Stan McChrystal shaped and led, relies on personal relationships, trust, decentralized execution, and competence. The Secretary of Defense should select an existing three-star with counterinsurgency, counter-terror, and interagency experience to serve alongside the army commander. This will clearly demonstrate that an airman is engaged on the front lines working with the Army commander in a direct and dynamic way.

A three-star airman in Afghanistan would signify to the world the seriousness that the United States places on the responsible use of airpower. Strategically, airpower offers the greatest promise and the biggest risk, as General McChrystal warned. A three-star airman physically in Afghanistan signals to the Afghan president and Afghan people our heightened commitment to limiting collateral damage and using airpower in ways that benefit the Afghan people.

Finally, the Air Force Chief of Staff should pick the best cadre of two-star and one-star generals to cycle back and forth between Afghanistan and Washington DC, where in both locations they work issues related to Afghanistan. The Air Force should review the follow-on assignments of current general officers who have served in Afghanistan for one year or longer. The Air Force will learn that these leaders have ended up in positions where their battlefield experience and relationships are not tapped for the current fight. A change in approach will create the necessary continuity and strong relationships required to wage counterinsurgency war.

Afghanistan in Practice:

In line with the second recommendation, above, to put this proposed air strategy into action in Afghanistan the USAF should implement an approach that has proven successful in the past by identifying a senior three-star Airman

to serve physically in Afghanistan and directly on Gen McChrystal's new staff. Just as the first CSAF, Gen "Hap" Arnold, did when he called Gen Kenney to Washington to inform him of his new job working directly for Gen McArthur, the current CSAF might do the same. As Sam McGowan recounts, "When Gen Kenney arrived in DC, he learned that he would be assigned to the Pacific to work for a General who had a reputation for cutting no slack to his air commanders—General Douglas MacArthur. Kenney would command the Allied Air Forces in the Southwest Pacific and the Fifth Air Force." This senior leadership team produced strategic results.

This AF three-star on Gen McChrystal's staff would adapt the AF force structure, command & control, and employment strategy to match the change in the overall Afghanistan strategy. The AF needs to provide effective support to the ground forces in a tailored and responsive way that adapts to the conditions on the ground. As the Combined Forces Air Component Commander (CFACC) forward in Afghanistan, this senior airman will have operational control (OPCON) over all AF assets in the country, and tactical control (TACON) or a Direct Supporting role for the assets supporting Afghanistan from other locations.

This senior airman would establish a strong relationship at the top to achieve the National strategy. Army culture, particularly the Army Task Force culture that Gen McChrystal created and succeeded with, relies on personal relationships, trust, decentralized execution, and competence. During one of his first meetings with Air Force personnel, the current CSAF remarked that our AF has not employed its force in a way that produces Battle Buddies—those joint service colleagues and team members who live together, plan together, and fight together. A three-star AF general in Afghanistan could be a valued, productive member of Gen McChrystal's staff and signify to all that responsible use of airpower is a top priority in the region.

With respect to span of control, the Air Force concentrates most of its very senior general officers in the garrison mission of organizing, training, & equipping its forces, with only one three-star airman as the CFACC leading the

air campaign for both Iraq and Afghanistan. The USAF does provide one or two Air Force generals who serve in country to coordinate between the CFACC and the Army commanding general, but this is not enough to increase the perception and result in the same relationship that can occur between more senior generals. In contrast, the US Army has a four-star and several three-stars running the Iraq war, a four-star commander of US Forces in Afghanistan, a four-star CDRCENTCOM providing oversight and strategic vision for CENTCOM, and a number of three-stars on the battlefield. Placing the right AF three-star in Afghanistan, with the right background and experience, alongside the new Army commander will affirm that an Airman is engaged on the front lines working directly with that commander in a dynamic way.

To further enhance continuity, the United States should consider executing the same methodology envisioned by Secretary Gates where a cadre of military officers cycle to and from Afghanistan and Washington DC, where in both locations they work issues related to success in Afghanistan. From a self-critical assessment, the USAF might review the follow-on assignments of those general officers who served in Afghanistan for one year or longer. The Service may learn that these leaders end up in positions where their battlefield experience and relationships are not exploited for the current fight. Cycling leaders between jobs in Washington and Afghanistan would provide much-needed continuity and would give the Nation a better chance to achieve its strategic objectives.

War calls for bold actions, not the status quo. America should put more of its seasoned general officers closer to the combat zone. The United States needs its talented senior airmen out of the boardroom and onto the battlefield.

Conclusion

This paper does not attempt a solution to all the problems in Afghanistan or anywhere else. Its recommendations are specific to the region and the current context and more specifically to the proper role of airpower at this time and in this place. Nonetheless, lessons can be learned that should translate to broader responsible uses of airpower.

In international relations, order is distributed based on capability and influenced by international regimes. Airpower gives the United States a seat at the table in Central Asia. The guests at this table include several countries important to United States' interests and to the world's future. Airpower enables the United States to participate in the regional balance of power, and, hopefully, to tip the balance in favor of US interests.

Many experts refer to Afghanistan as the graveyard of empires. Citing a bleak historical record, they doom the United States to failure. Every attempt by a foreign power to build a stable, lasting government in Afghanistan has failed. The great British Empire lost three bloody wars to the Afghans. The powerful Soviet Union withdrew after a crushing defeat during the 1980s. The Afghans themselves failed every attempt to produce a lasting central government, with one debatable exception—an impressive, if only twenty-five years long Afghan Empire during 1700s. But today's conditions in Afghanistan dramatically differ from those of this ruinous past. At no time in human history have conditions been better to fundamentally change Afghanistan. The US, its partner nations, and a fledgling Afghan central government are positioned to succeed where others have failed. The reasons for this outlook emerge from a more careful reading of history, a deeper assessment about what's different today, and an honest assessment of current strategies.

Deeper inspection reveals the ingredients of failure. Each provoked the wrath of an historic force of nature—the mountain tribes who live on either side of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Never conquered, these tribes

historically determined the success or failure of central governments and of foreign interventions. The tribal organizing principle weaves throughout the entire fabric of Afghan society, geography, and history. Their numbers spiked into hundreds of loosely confederated organizations with their own balance of power achieved through inter-tribal conflict. When need arises, such as with malevolent foreign occupation, these tribes united. When conquering powers secured the Afghan lowlands, the tribes hunkered down and waited for as long as necessary before coming down to reject those foreign antibodies. Losing the hearts and minds of this group has always spelled the beginning of the end for foreign occupiers and Afghan central governments.

Interventions went badly when foreign powers misunderstood the relationship of force to Afghan tribal culture and geography. An ancient Afghan code requires vengeance to redeem harm and insult. Heavy-handed use of force by the British and Soviet empires unified tribal peoples bent on eye-for-an-eye revenge. Destroying and killing like Genghis Khan, Soviet Russia's brutal use of force, especially airpower, unified fierce tribes against it and against their puppet Afghan government. Force had no sustainable coercive power over a people fully able to exploit geography to their comparative advantage. Culture and geography rendered imperial forces nearly irrelevant.

Historically, the seeds of defeat sprouted from imprudent actions that deeply offended tribal and Islamic values inherent to the Afghan population. During the first British-Afghan war in the 1800s, a steady flow of Afghan women to and from a British military camp violated Afghan honor. In the 1920s, a picture of an unveiled Afghan Queen shaking the hand of a foreign minister further agitated rebellion. The Afghan central government appeared too Western, but in Western minds, these seemingly insignificant events produced strategic failure. Today, insurgents effectively use information technologies to paint a bad, undeserved picture of Coalition forces. Preserved within their geographic and cyber-sanctuaries, they brew discord. Today, the United States and its partners have the means to contest a remarkably uncontested cyberspace to challenge its adversary. It is past time that they do.

Complicating matters, great powers failed when competing nation-states rallied against them to support Afghan resistance. During the ten year Soviet occupation, outside powers provided more than five billion dollars, stinger missiles to contest the air, and other support. With it, the Afghans eliminated the Soviet's technological airpower advantage. Costs mounted. The Soviets withdrew defeated. The lesson: conflict spans beyond the actual country in which it happens. Regional powers provide strategic leverage during war.

America's policy must take these lessons into account. First, as is well documented, America's actions should create time and space for the Afghan government to effectively deal with the insurgency with significantly less American involvement. Second, actions should create time and space for a new balance of power arrangement to emerge in Central Asia. This balance of power should be based upon investment inside Afghanistan and Pakistan that assists those nations in developing new industries. Exploitable natural resources have been valued at three trillion dollars.¹ Neighbors want Afghanistan to connect their markets. During the window of time provided by President Obama and Congress, America should transition responsibility for stability in Afghanistan to the Afghan central government and its neighbors. The opportunity cost of extended involvement puts at risk other strategic interests around the globe.

These goals are stated in recognition of the inherent potential of new regional interests. Most importantly, new tools, such as airpower, exist on a scale never before seen in human history. Proper use of these instruments has the potential to fundamentally change the region. However, America should severely restrict the destructive form of airpower in Pakistan and Afghanistan, replacing it with productive forms of airpower including increased air mobility and ISR. United States military commanders should put a moratorium on air strikes in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan. Civil

¹ Global Research, "Afghan Geological Reserves Worth a Trillion Dollars," Global Research.ca, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=20100201&articleId=1732>
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aviation should be accelerated. Airpower should be expanded beyond support to the security line of operation into support to economic and governance lines of operation.

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