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14. ABSTRACT The President of the United States recently called for a comprehensive review of U.S. strategy in Afghanistan in the wake of increasing violence and a resurgent Taliban. Comments by the current Democratic and Republican Presidential candidates, and other senior leaders, indicate that additional U.S. forces will be sent to Afghanistan in the near future. It is, therefore, more important than ever to ensure that the United States has a reliable and effective logistics system in place to support U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Though there are many challenging logistics issues to be addressed, achieving logistics success in Afghanistan and avoiding a certain road to defeat hinges on the ability of the United States and NATO to maintain reliable and secure ground lines of communication (LOC) into and throughout Afghanistan. This paper describes the strategic and operational LOCs used to support forces in Afghanistan today and the vulnerabilities of those LOCs due to military, criminal, and political action as well as inaction. The paper reviews the extraordinary efforts undertaken by the British and the Soviets to maintain LOCs during their wars in Afghanistan and suggests lessons learned that are applicable to U.S. and NATO forces today. Finally, the paper concludes with specific recommendations on how to better secure the Afghanistan LOCs at the theater-strategic and operational levels.					
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**CLOSE A SURE ROAD TO DEFEAT IN AFGHANISTAN BY KEEPING THE
LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN**

by

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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College is partial satisfaction of
the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily
endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy**

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31 October 2008

Abstract

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The President of the United States recently called for a comprehensive review of U.S. strategy in Afghanistan in the wake of increasing violence and a resurgent Taliban.

Comments by the current Democratic and Republican Presidential candidates, and other senior leaders, indicate that additional U.S. forces will be sent to Afghanistan in the near future. It is, therefore, more important than ever to ensure that the United States has a reliable and effective logistics system in place to support U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

Though there are many challenging logistics issues to be addressed, achieving logistics success in Afghanistan and avoiding a certain road to defeat hinges on the ability of the United States and NATO to maintain reliable and secure ground lines of communication (LOC) into and throughout Afghanistan. This paper describes the strategic and operational LOCs used to support forces in Afghanistan today and the vulnerabilities of those LOCs due to military, criminal, and political action as well as inaction. The paper reviews the extraordinary efforts undertaken by the British and the Soviets to maintain LOCs during their wars in Afghanistan and suggests lessons learned that are applicable to U.S. and NATO forces today. Finally, the paper concludes with specific recommendations on how to better secure the Afghanistan LOCs at the theater-strategic and operational levels.

Afghanistan Today and the Challenge of Logistics

Afghanistan and her neighbors have been much in the news. A resurgent Taliban has stepped up attacks inside Afghanistan, and while violence abates in Iraq, the opposite trend is evident in Afghanistan. In June 2008 there were thirty-nine troops-in-contact battles in Iraq while in Afghanistan there were 419.¹ In early September 2008 the United States acknowledged making ground assaults from Afghanistan into Pakistan's northwest frontier against suspected Taliban insurgents.² Later in the month, the United States and Pakistan acknowledged for first time that an exchange of fire occurred between each others' military forces following a tense incident on the Afghanistan border involving Pakistani troops and a U.S. Army OH-58D Kiowa helicopter flying as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).³ While both the United States and Pakistan have publicly sought to downplay the incidents, Pakistan has vocally complained that it will resist any incursion into Pakistani territory that it views as a violation of its sovereignty. As of this writing, the Republican and Democratic Presidential candidates have made Afghanistan a major foreign policy issue in their campaigns, both pledging to increase U.S. troop levels if elected. One candidate, Senator Barack Obama, has emphasized his readiness to target high-level Al Qaeda targets inside Pakistan—with or without Pakistani compliance.⁴ The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, recently told lawmakers that he was not convinced the United States was winning in Afghanistan, and on 24 September 2008 President Bush assigned the Deputy National Security Advisor, Lieutenant General Douglas Lute, the job of leading an interagency review of overall U.S. strategy in Afghanistan.⁵

Whatever changes are made to U.S. strategy in Afghanistan, it is clear that the United States and NATO are not going to be scaling down operations there soon. In fact, the opposite seems inevitable. The logistics challenge of supporting forces in Afghanistan is enormous. As a landlocked nation, Afghanistan suffers from geographic isolation, severe terrain, and harsh weather. These characteristics combined with Afghanistan's long history of violently resisting foreign invaders have greatly complicated logistics for occupying forces from Alexander the Great to the Soviet Union. U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan today face numerous logistics challenges, including multiple U.S. and Allied logistics systems, poor quality roads, limited airfields, and expensive civilian contracted logistics support. While each of these issues affects the ability to provide reliable, flexible, and economical logistics support, there is one issue that is critical to maintaining a survivable logistics system and unconstrained operations in the country. I argue in this paper that achieving logistics success in Afghanistan and avoiding a certain road to defeat hinges on the ability of the United States and NATO to maintain reliable and secure ground lines of communication (LOC) into and throughout Afghanistan. I support this position by reviewing the methods used by British and Soviet forces to secure ground LOCs during their wars in Afghanistan and by describing the vulnerabilities of the LOCs that Allied forces depend on for sustainment today. I conclude the paper with specific recommendations on how to better secure the Afghanistan LOCs at the theater-strategic and operational levels.

The Strategic Logistics Environment

The United States and NATO have identified three strategic surface lines of communication for the sustainment of forces in Afghanistan: the northern LOC, the central LOC, and the southern LOC (See Figure 1). The northern LOC is depicted as originating in Germany and moves through Poland, Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan before terminating in Afghanistan. The central LOC also originates in Germany. It follows a slightly more southerly route through the same countries as the northern LOC, except that it runs through Turkmenistan vice Uzbekistan before crossing the border into Afghanistan. The southern LOC is a sea LOC until it reaches the Pakistani port of Karachi. From there it follows one of two overland routes through western Pakistan before crossing the border into Afghanistan to the southwest of Kandahar and Kabul (see Figure 2). The southern LOC is by far the most important LOC of the three since the large majority of sustainment travels over this route. In fact, a recent NATO brief lists the southern LOC as the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's "number one priority."⁶

Before discussing the southern LOC in detail, it is worth reviewing some important characteristics of the northern and central LOCs, which offer the United States and NATO at least a measure of logistics flexibility at the strategic level. The Soviet Union depended on these same routes to support its forces during its nine year occupation of Afghanistan from 1979-1989. In particular, the Soviets relied on the northern LOC through Uzbekistan, which was vital for sustainment yet constantly vulnerable. Running through some of the most treacherous terrain in Afghanistan, the route was subject to ice, rockslides, avalanches, and heavy snowfall, and it was virtually impassable from

November to May.⁷ When the route was open, it could only handle 500-1,000 trucks per day in comparison to 4,000-10,000 trucks over a similar highway running through good terrain. This route was also the target of mujahideen attacks; the Soviets lost 800-1,000 troops killed on one day in 1981 in the Salang tunnel, which is a necessary choke point along the route.⁸ Use of either the northern or central LOC today assumes the support of countries along their paths: Russia, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. And, the support of these countries is by no means assured. Though the United States leased a base at Karshi-Khanabad (K2), Uzbekistan near the Afghan border for almost four years, Uzbekistan evicted U.S. forces from the base in July 2005, two months after the United States harshly criticized Uzbekistan for its handling of a prison uprising in the city of Andijan in May 2005. Uzbekistan subsequently cut off joint military exercises and also discontinued all cooperative counterterrorism efforts. During the same timeframe, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a regional security organization composed of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, called on the United States to set a timetable for its complete withdrawal from the region.⁹ Since that time, United States-Uzbek relations have thawed somewhat and Uzbekistan has agreed to allow NATO to reuse K2 and is reconsidering its “current state of affairs” with the United States.¹⁰

While logistics traffic over the northern and central LOCs today is minimal, the potential for increased traffic over the northern and central LOCs is improved by a Russian decision in March 2008 to allow NATO member states, and non-member states contributing to ISAF, to send non-military freight through Russia via truck or rail.¹¹ While the Russian offer only applies to non-military cargo, it nonetheless offers

assistance to the NATO effort in Afghanistan and goes so far as to list Russian freight companies authorized to haul NATO supplies.¹² Whether the Russians will honor their offer in the future, particularly in light of their August 2008 adventure into South Ossetia and the subsequent cooling in relations with the West, remains to be seen. In August, the Deputy Head of Russia's General Staff warned that Poland would risk military strikes if it allowed the planned deployment of U.S. missile interceptors on its soil.¹³ And in October, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Central Asian regional security organization of former Soviet republics dominated by Moscow, announced plans to establish an 11,000-man army in Central Asia in response to the growing insurgency in Afghanistan and to deal with potential "challenges to the sovereignty" of its member states.¹⁴ The political climate has certainly chilled to the point where the United States and NATO may find it difficult to secure reliable logistics support from, or through, Afghanistan's northern neighbors.

The diplomatic, operational, and geographic vulnerabilities of the northern and central LOCs highlight the importance of the southern LOC to U.S. and NATO forces. In fact, the NATO's and United States' war effort in Afghanistan would be crippled by the loss or serious degradation of the southern LOC since it is the primary route for the movement of bulk supplies such as fuel, ammunition, and construction materials needed to sustain NATO and U.S. troop levels—currently at 65,000 and growing.¹⁵ General Barry McCaffrey, USA (Ret), who recently visited Afghanistan along with SACEUER, General Bantz J. Craddock, said that losing Pakistani support "may well stop our air and ground logistics access across Pakistan and *place our entire NATO presence in severe jeopardy*" [emphasis is added].¹⁶

Stretching approximately 1,100 miles, the southern LOC (consisting of two road networks) is the lifeline of U.S. and NATO logistics support. Open sources indicate that approximately 70 percent of all NATO supplies travel over the Karachi-Peshawar-Torkham route into Afghanistan. The remaining 30 percent travel via the Karachi to Chaman route or via air.¹⁷ The continued use of this route is today threatened by a combination of military, diplomatic, and criminal factors. Recognizing the value of the route to U.S. operations in Afghanistan, the Taliban has issued death threats against any driver hauling Allied cargo.¹⁸ And, attacks by insurgents or other armed groups have been reported to be behind the destruction of up to forty fuel trucks near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border in March 2008.¹⁹ Pakistani cargo trucks carrying U.S. and NATO supplies have frequently been pilfered of all or a portion of their contents. While commercial trucks are unmarked and apparently do not travel in large convoys, they have nonetheless been targeted by criminal and insurgent elements who have apparently devised means of manufacturing seals to mask evidence of tampering.²⁰ The seriousness of this issue was highlighted in June when the United States lost track of four helicopter engines valued at \$13.2 million that had been shipped via truck from Afghanistan to Pakistan for eventual retrograde to the United States.²¹ The southern LOC has been equally vulnerable to U.S. and Pakistani politics. In September 2008 Pakistan closed the all-important Torkham crossing point into Afghanistan. While the government claimed the closure was due to security concerns, the move came on the very same day that the Pakistan military announced that it reserved the right to retaliate against U.S. cross-border attacks originating in Afghanistan.²² As noted earlier, Pakistan made good on this

promise later in September, when it exchanged fire with a U.S. helicopter in the border area.

The Operational Logistics Environment and the Lessons of History

The terrain and environment upon entering Afghanistan overland is anything but forgiving. Just smaller in area than Texas, Afghanistan is 50 percent larger than Iraq and has twice the population.²³ Unlike Iraq, which is mostly flat desert, Afghanistan is over 60 percent mountainous, with much of that terrain above 14,000 feet and devoid of vegetation. A large portion of the country not at elevation is desert plain and subject to sandstorms and drought. In the winter, temperatures average -4 F and severe blizzards are not uncommon with winds up to 109 mph. In the summer temperatures rise as high as 96F.²⁴ The transportation network in the country does not lend itself well to logistics support. Despite its size, there are only approximately 1,700 miles of paved roads in Afghanistan, the remainder being semi-improved and subject to closure during flooding or freezing.²⁵ Usable rail and inland waterways are virtually non-existent. From a military point of view, the transportation network favors a defender because the numerous mountain passes serve to canalize traffic and provide excellent terrain for mining and ambush. In the past 150 years, two great military powers, Great Britain and the Soviet Union, faced the challenge of supporting large military forces inside Afghanistan. Their experiences suggest several lessons for NATO and United States forces today.

Great Britain fought the Second Anglo-Afghan War from 1878-1880 as part of a strategy to counteract perceived Russian encroachment from the north. After invading

with a force of over 40,000 British-Indian combatants, Great Britain soon found much of its military effort devoted to the task of “establishing, maintaining, and securing LOCs.”²⁶ In fact, eventually an astounding 70 percent of its troops and 50 percent of its field guns in Afghanistan were dedicated to LOC-related missions.²⁷ The terrain contributed to the challenges because British baggage trains depended on pack animals that suffered from the effects of limited vegetation, icy ground, and deep gorges that claimed many an animal along British LOCs. Also vulnerable to guerrilla attacks, the British established fortified posts along key routes, in one case dedicating four infantry regiments and two cavalry regiments to secure a single route. All baggage trains moved with escorts and frequently at night in order to mitigate enemy attacks. Host nation transport was used extensively, and to good effect, though the transfer of supplies to military personnel was carefully planned. Recognizing the need to limit logistics movement, the British also emphasized foraging and stockpiled critical resources such as water that were hard to transport and were vulnerable to interdiction. Though at great cost, Great Britain was able to maintain secure LOCs and establish an effective logistics system. However, the war was expensive and unpopular at home and by the end of 1880 British forces had returned to India.²⁸

Just under 100 years after the British departure, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in a bid to ensure stable Communist rule on their southern border. The Soviets began operations with a force of 85,000 and left nine years later with a force of 115,000.²⁹ The story of how the Soviets became mired in a complex counter-insurgency in Afghanistan is well chronicled. What is less well known is how the Soviet Union ultimately prevailed in the battle to control Afghanistan’s LOCs, a monumental

undertaking that the Soviets came to refer to as the “highway war” (dorozhaia voina).³⁰ The Soviets began the Afghan war with troops, equipment, and tactics suited for conventional operations in Western Europe and paid a high price along Afghanistan’s treacherous roadways at places such as the previously mentioned Salang tunnel. Neither their drivers nor their trucks were ready for Afghanistan’s steep inclines, and, as a result, many were lost both to accidents and enemy activity.³¹ As the insurgency in Afghanistan gained momentum, the Soviets found that all routes in the country were vulnerable to mines and ambush and adapted, albeit slowly, to the threat.³² They trained their drivers better and went to a new truck, the Kamaz, which proved itself sufficiently powerful and durable enough for Afghanistan’s tough roads. They also embarked on an extensive road building program, particularly along key supply routes. Many of these roads survive today and are being used by U.S. and NATO forces. When the transportation of fuel via truck became a major logistical problem, the Soviets built a pipeline into Afghanistan and then guarded the length of it to protect against interdiction. To cut down on the need to shuttle broken equipment back and forth, they adopted a fix-forward concept of maintenance, and they began to rely more heavily on helicopter re-supply to reach units in remote locations or which were in need of emergency replenishment.³³ They developed tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) for the conduct of convoy operations that incorporated the use of mobile security elements, engineers for de-mining operations, and attack helicopters for route reconnaissance and close air support. They improved the execution of pre-convoy mission analysis, with emphasis on actions at key choke points, and incorporated combined arms, pre-convoy security sweeps, and counter-ambush, immediate action drills.³⁴ Like the British, the

Soviets developed an extensive system of fixed garrisons as well as temporary outposts along the entire span of key LOCs, often within line of sight of each other in order to be mutually supporting. Garrisons along LOCs were manned by a combination of combat troops and “highway troops,” which focused on movement control tasks and logistics.³⁵ Some Soviet methods were heavy-handed and violated tenets of smart counter-insurgency operations such as the practice creating a “no-man’s land” along key stretches of roadway by eradicating all vegetation and villages within the first line of hills parallel to the planned route. This may have improved force protection in the short term, but certainly did little to win hearts and minds.³⁶ Still, while the Soviets lost the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, they arguably won the “highway war” after making a number of successful adaptations. Their ability to control the LOCs and create a flexible logistics system with the use of helicopters, pipelines, and other adaptations were key to sustaining a large force and facilitating its safe and orderly withdrawal in 1989.

From Yesterday to Today

U.S. and NATO logisticians tasked with supporting a 65,000 man force today face many of the same challenges faced by British and Soviet logisticians of years past. The climate and topography of Afghanistan are essentially the same. The Soviets contributed some significant infrastructure in the form of roads and tunnels, though large tracts of the country, including areas very much in need of NATO military presence, are still difficult to reach by road. Deep snows, frozen roads, and steep passes are every bit the challenge to U.S. forces as they were to the Soviets in their Kamaz trucks or the British with their horse and mule trains. Allied forces today face an enemy very similar

to the one faced by their earlier counterparts. The Taliban, much like the mujahideen fighters of the 1980s, are skilled guerilla fighters who are adept at asymmetric warfare and make a point of targeting LOCs. This year alone, the Taliban have killed approximately eighty civilian drivers hauling fuel in support of the United States and NATO.³⁷ Allied logisticians today, like their British and Soviet predecessors, have demonstrated remarkable adaptability and flexibility at the tactical level. Like the Soviets, U.S. forces have used helicopters extensively and have also employed commercial fixed wing, military fixed wing, and air delivery parachute drops to support troops in the field. Borrowing a page from the British, the United States has frequently used mule trains to deliver supplies to troops in remote areas.³⁸

Unlike their predecessors, the United States and NATO do not control territory immediately adjacent to Afghanistan. So, while the British and Soviets could focus their attention completely on the considerable challenge of controlling LOCs inside Afghanistan, NATO and U.S. forces today must secure reliable and survivable LOCs through foreign nations, most notably Pakistan. Though they were generally spared the burden of having to defend LOCs outside of Afghanistan, the British and Soviets did run all of their logistics across the same routes and were therefore predictable targets. Both the Soviets and the British, however, recognized that vulnerable LOCs were a grave threat to operations and, therefore, took decisive measures to include protecting all re-supply convoys and establishing numerous garrisons along key LOCs.³⁹

The United States, too, has recognized the need to protect logistics convoys and has employed aerial reconnaissance and other measures to improve secure movement through high threat areas, though these practices are not followed in each of

Afghanistan's regional commands. Effective TTPs that incorporate lessons learned from Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, and the Soviet Afghan War, are not being regularly and uniformly applied. For instance, practices that are Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in Iraq, such as the use of a single, dedicated convoy security net, battlespace movement control centers, and dedicated convoy escort units, are not established across regional commands. There are few combat outposts along long stretches of road and therefore little opportunity to employ Quick Reaction Forces (QRF) to respond to convoys in distress. These deficiencies have created vulnerabilities such as 150 truck convoys that have been forced to back track on narrow roads following mine strikes.⁴⁰ Though work is being done to improve the situation, the United States and NATO are clearly not matching their commendable logistics flexibility at the tactical level with flexibility and sustainability at the theater-strategic level because the Southern LOC is the single tenuous lifeline for a force of 65,000 and growing.

The Risks

The commander designate of the United States Central Command, General David Patraeus, said that he has reached the conclusion that Afghanistan will be “the longest campaign of the long war.”⁴¹ Clearly, an unreliable or fragile logistics system in Afghanistan is unacceptable. Re-supply delays on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border have already caused significant disruptions in the past year such as the depletion of fuel stockpiles to less than 3 days of supply (DOS), which is dangerously insufficient in the logistics business.⁴² It is not hard to imagine that similar shortfalls, or worse, in the midst of a relief-in-place or major offensive against the Taliban, could have significant

operational impact. Failure to adequately stockpile critical supplies, such as ammunition, and an inability to protect air and ground LOCs were principal reasons for the French defeat at Dien Bein Phu in 1954—a defeat that precipitated its withdrawal from Vietnam.⁴³

Vulnerabilities along the LOCs through Pakistan and Afghanistan are having significant economic costs. Along with the previously noted pilferage occurring inside Pakistan along the southern LOC, it has been estimated that contracted civilian drivers pay \$8,000-\$10,000 in bribes to move their cargo along a typical re-supply route in Afghanistan.⁴⁴ The United States has spent \$34 billion in Afghanistan this year, or \$2.8 billion a month.⁴⁵ One wonders how much of this is being lost to bribes, payoffs, and pilferage because of unsecured LOCs. The Taliban cannot win a conventional fight with the United States and NATO, but do have the ability to erode domestic opinion in the United States and Europe by inflicting high casualties. As the United States draws down in Iraq and builds up in Afghanistan, it is logical to assume that more graphic and more frequent media coverage of the fighting and casualties in Afghanistan will follow. Vulnerable LOCs in Afghanistan and Pakistan create the real opportunity for the enemy to score a significant propaganda and recruiting victory with a spectacular (e.g., Salang tunnel) attack on U.S. or NATO convoys.

The Way Forward

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, said last month that the upcoming review of the U.S.'s Afghanistan strategy must avoid looking at the country as an “island,” but must focus on Pakistan as well.⁴⁶ The southern LOC literally

and figuratively represents this critical linkage. Recent cross-border attacks into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan by the United States have caused the Pakistani government domestic embarrassment and angst and have subsequently affected the free flow of Allied logistics. Certainly, the benefit of such attacks must be weighed against the potential damage to U.S.—Pakistani relations and the ability to sustain NATO and U.S. operations taking place in Afghanistan. Short of eliminating Osama bin Laden, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, or another high-ranking Al Qaeda leader, it is hard to conceive of an individual cross-border operation that is worth endangering the sustainment of the entire U.S. and NATO effort in Afghanistan. Along with supporting a stable political environment, more must be done to ensure that trucks carrying U.S. and NATO sustainment cargo through Pakistan arrive safe, secure, and on time. Planners should consider all potential options to make this happen, including alternate routes, security escorts, and real-time satellite tracking of trucks and cargo. George Thorpe, in his classic book, *Pure Logistics*, makes a convincing case that Napoleon's failure in Russia during the winter of 1811-1812 was not due to lack of supplies or long LOCs, but rather due to his failure to secure his LOCs, which were under attack in Poland and Lithuania because of previous French heavy-handedness among the local populations.⁴⁷ Likewise, the United States would do well to tread lightly in Pakistan, since it holds the key to logistics success in Afghanistan.

To the north, the United States and NATO face significant political challenges in securing the cooperation of states bordering Afghanistan, particularly Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. This is especially true following the Russian incursion into South Ossetia, since Russia is the dominant partner in both Central Asian economics and security issues.

As in Pakistan, the United should balance its interests in countries like Uzbekistan, deciding how far it can or should insist on issues like enforcing human rights. As Stephen Blank, an expert on Central Asia from the U.S. Army War College, noted, it is time for the State and Defense Departments to “knock heads” in developing a coordinated and definitive national policy in Central Asia that is supported by the President.⁴⁸ While Russian countermoves are always a possibility, the potential for continued and even expanded military support relationships with the Central Asian states seems possible if for economic reasons alone. As an example, the United States still has 1,000 troops at an important military logistics hub at Manas International Airport in Kyrgyzstan and reportedly injects up to \$50 million annually into the Kyrgyz economy as a result.⁴⁹ Before the break over Adjian, the United States contributed over \$300 million in aid to Uzbekistan to assist it in fighting domestic terrorism as well as paying for the cost of leasing the K2 facility.⁵⁰ With the prospects of a worldwide recession looming, United States money will be a powerful lever in gaining access to Central Asia and expanding logistics capability on Afghanistan’s northern border.

Both the British and the Soviets in Afghanistan had policies of foraging or living off the land to alleviate some of the strain on their logistics systems. This is not an option for the United States, though we do have the opportunity to mitigate the volume of traffic on our LOCs by more judiciously scaling logistics support. One way to do this is to re-evaluate the standard of living we seek to provide our soldiers, sailors, and airmen in country. This is not a new issue. Reflecting back on World War II, General S.L.A. Marshall wrote, “The supply discipline of the United States is regulated by the pressure

to give troops the maximum possible of the comforts which the middle-class American has learned to expect.”⁵¹

Anyone who has been to large Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) in Iraq or Afghanistan in the past five years can testify that we have done well in meeting this standard by successfully providing many creature comforts, such as video games, fast food outlets, and gymnasiums on par with many large bases in the United States. The flip side of this “nothing is too good for the troops” mentality, however, is that every gallon of Baskin Robbins ice cream delivered to a FOB must travel over a dangerous LOC that is a prime target for the enemy. It is also true that the creature comforts we have made available on our large FOBs rarely make it to the troops at distant outposts or hilltop garrisons. Would it not be better to invest more energy in supporting troops and Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRT) stationed at remote places like Lashkar and Heart than in supporting a relatively luxurious standard of living at places like Kabul and Bagram? With some adjustments, it is likely that ground traffic over our LOCs would decrease, and even if they did not, at least the risks would be undertaken in support of front-line troops doing the most risky and challenging work among the Afghan people.

Helicopter delivery and fixed wing air delivery will no doubt continue to be an important part of tactical distribution in Afghanistan. But, it is also clear that the bulk of supplies such as Class I (Subsistence), Class III (Petroleum Oil & Lubricants), and Class V (Ammunition) will have to move overland and this means that the United States and NATO have no choice but to improve security and visibility of the LOCs. Many of the most important re-supply routes today are the same ones that the Soviets fought the Mujahideen to control in the 1980s.⁵² It seems that history is indeed repeating itself.

The good news for the United States is that many of the hard-earned lessons in convoy operations from OIF are transferable to Afghanistan. The Marine Corp's *Convoy Operations Battle Book* is a good case in point. This 160-page document, published in 2005, covers a wide variety of convoy TTPs, such as how to organize a convoy, conduct fire planning, analyze battlespace geometry, and communicate with pilots overhead.⁵³

The knowledge base among U.S. forces is certainly there but for a number of reasons, including differing standards among NATO regional commands, many of the convoy TTPs used in Iraq today, and indeed practiced by the Soviets in Afghanistan twenty years ago, are being neglected. If and when the United States and NATO chains of command are unified under a single commander, as recently proposed by Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman, standardizing convoy procedures in Afghanistan should be a top priority.⁵⁴ Better convoy procedures alone, however, will not secure the LOCs. The lessons of numerous "small wars" and those of the British and the Soviets in Afghanistan indicate that physical presence along the LOCs in Afghanistan will be necessary as long as the Taliban remains a viable fighting force.⁵⁵ This means that as we build up force structure in Afghanistan we should plan to reinforce and better secure our LOCs by establishing multi-functional, combat outposts along key routes. These combat outposts should be manned by a combination of combat, combat support, and combat service support troops capable of providing Quick Reaction Force (QRF), Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), de-mining, re-fueling, re-supply, medical and movement control support. Since fuel trucks are especially vulnerable, we should send more Army POL companies to Afghanistan and detailed planning should be done to determine the best place for the transfer of fuel and other critical commodities from civilian contracted

trucks to military trucks. The possibility of another pipeline from Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan should be explored and top priority should be assigned to maintaining large fuel stockpiles to offset re-supply disruptions.

Logistics cannot win the war in Afghanistan. Only sound counter-insurgency tactics, rightly applied by the sufficient number of troops on the ground can do that. But history tells us that logistics can lose a war, and the history of Afghanistan indicates that our enemy there will battle us tenaciously for control of the LOCs. Therefore, an indispensable component of a winning strategy in Afghanistan is a commitment to maintaining secure ground LOCs from the theater-strategic to the tactical level of war.

AFGHANISTAN STRATEGIC LINES OF COMMUNICATION



Figure 1

Southern LOC to AFG

- SACEUR's Priority No. 1
- No NATO agreements with PAK, some bilateral agreements
- Talks are suspended (internal political situation)
- Requires establishment of NATO Liaison Office (PAK LNO)

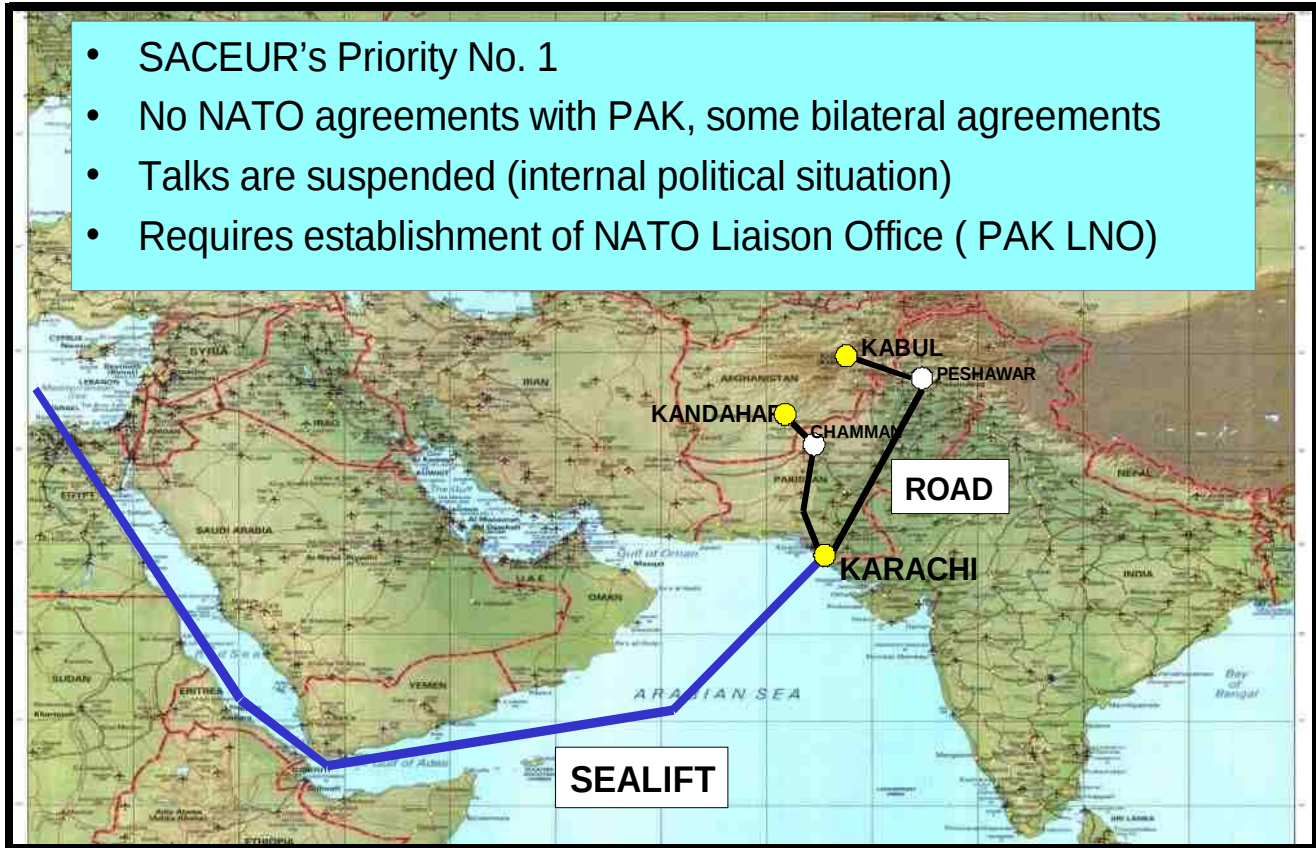


Figure 2

End Notes

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- ¹ McCaffrey, "After Action Report: Visit to SHAPE Headquarters and Afghanistan," 6.
- ² "United States Crosses Pakistan Border to Raid Terror Camp."
- ³ "United States, Pakistan Exchange Shots at Volatile Border."
- ⁴ "McCain and Obama on Afghanistan."
- ⁵ "Bush Orders Afghan Strategy Review."
- ⁶ "Strategic Surface Lines of Communication to AFG."
- ⁷ Russo, *Soviet Logistics in Afghanistan*, 3-5.
- ⁸ Ibid., 11.
- ⁹ Beehner, "Severing of United States-Uzbek Ties Over Counterterrorism"; Beehner "Documenting Adijan."
- ¹⁰ Ibid., Najibullah, "Russia: Moscow Looks to Expand Military Presence in Central Asia."
- ¹¹ Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey Downing, telephone interview with author, 7 October 2008; "Russian Unilateral Letter of Notification on the Nature of Transit Through Russian Territory of Non-Military Freight From NATO, NATO Member States, and Non-NATO ISAF Contributing States in Support of ISAF in Afghanistan," 1-6.
- ¹² "Forwarding Organizations entitled to payment for transportation of transit freight through Russian territory," 1-4.
- ¹³ Rolski and Karl, "Russia Makes New Threats Over U.S.-Poland Missile Deal."
- ¹⁴ Najibullah, "Eurasian Group Plans Regional Army Near Afghanistan."
- ¹⁵ Wolf, "Troop Pledges by Allies Fall Short."
- ¹⁶ McCaffrey, 5.
- ¹⁷ Roggio, "Pakistan Closes Torkham Border Crossing, Shuts Down NATO's Supply Line."
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Straziuso, "United States Loses 4 Helicopter Engines Worth \$13 Million."
- ²⁰ Hassan, "Karachi: Trucks Carrying ISAF Supplies Unprotected."
- ²¹ Straziuso.
- ²² Roggio.
- ²³ McCaffrey, 4.

²⁴ Clair, "Lessons in Combat Service Support Tactical Mobility: the Afghanistan Conflict, Falklands War, and Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm," 5-7.

²⁵ Ibid., 7.

²⁶ Granger, "Moving an Expeditionary Force: Three Case Studies in Afghanistan," 7.

²⁷ Ibid., 7.

²⁸ Ibid., 8-16.

²⁹ Clair, 4.

³⁰ Ibid., 9

³¹ Ibid., 10.

³² Blank, "Afghanistan and Beyond: Reflections on the Future of Warfare," 12.

³³ Russo, 14-16; Granger, 21.

³⁴ Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain, Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan*, 135-150.

³⁵ Granger, 43.

³⁶ McMichael, *Stumbling Bear: Soviet Military Performance in Afghanistan*, 56.

³⁷ Colonel Greg Reilly, telephone call with author, 23 September 2008.

³⁸ Lieutenant Colonel James Bierman, interview with author, 17 September 2008.

³⁹ Granger, 4-44.

⁴⁰ Colonel Greg Reilly.

⁴¹ Mulrine, "Patraeus Offers Words of Caution on Iraq; Afghanistan Outlook."

⁴² Colonel Travis Willis, interview with author, 9 September 2008 and Colonel Greg Riley.

⁴³ Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War: Logistics in Armed Conflict*, 164-185.

⁴⁴ Colonel Greg Reilly.

⁴⁵ McCaffrey, 4.

⁴⁶ "Bush Orders Afghan Strategy Review."

⁴⁷ Thorpe, *Pure Logistics, The Science of War Preparation*, 12-20.

⁴⁸ Beehner, "Documenting Adijan."

⁴⁹ Najibullah, "Russia: Moscow Looks to Expand Military Presence in Central Asia."

⁵⁰ Beehner, "Severing of United States-Uzbek Ties Over Counterterrorism."

⁵¹ Marshall, *The Soldier's Load and the Mobility of a Nation* , 85-86.

⁵² The Soviets fought several pitched battles with mujhaideen fighters along the Ghazni-Kabul corridor and along the Kandahar-Ghazni corridor in 1981. The Mujhaideen employed complex ambushes that reflected a great deal of sophistication and continued their attacks until the Soviets forced them to withdraw by fire and maneuver. Grau and Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War, How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, 81. These routes today are important re-supply routes for the United States and NATO and also the location of a great number of FOBs and PRTs.

⁵³ USMC *Convoy Operations Battlebook: Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Training, Planning, and Executing Convoy Operations*.

⁵⁴ Gilmore, "Pentagon Proposes Change to United States Command Structure in Afghanistan."

⁵⁵ USMC Small Wars Manual, SWM 3-2

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