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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

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JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL



APPLYING REALISM THEORY IN AFGHANISTAN

by

Michael E. Samples Jr.

Lieutenant Colonel, USMC

APPLYING REALISM THEORY IN AFGHANISTAN

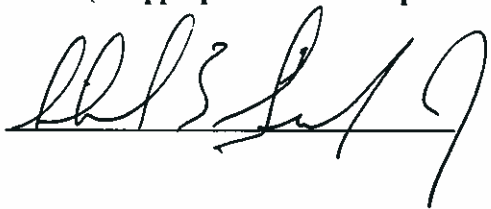
by

Michael E. Samples Jr.

Lieutenant Colonel, USMC

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Signature: 

19 May 2011

Thesis Adviser:

Signature: 

Robert E. Scurlock Jr., Colonel, U.S. Army

Approved by:

Signature: 

**James B. Miller, Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps,
Committee Member**

Signature: 

Paul Melshen, Ph.D., Committee Member

Signature: 
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ABSTRACT

Shortly after the attacks of 11 September 2001, President George W. Bush initiated the war in Afghanistan and ordered strikes against al Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime. During the last nine years, both the Bush Administration and the Obama Administration adjusted and modified the Afghanistan strategy in order to meet changing national strategic objectives. Most recently the Obama Administration, following a nine month strategy review, announced in March 2009 a new overarching AfPak strategy, and in December of 2009 announced a renewed Afghanistan strategy. These strategies are now being executed with the following objectives: “to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda,” “to degrade the Taliban,” “to prevent their return,” and to transition to Afghan government and security force lead by July 2011. One year after President Obama’s December 2009 West Point speech, are the policy, strategy and objectives for Afghanistan in the United States’ vital national interests? Utilizing the Realism Theories of Hans J. Morgenthau as a comparative model, this thesis will demonstrate that the current United States national policy, strategy, and objectives for Afghanistan meet the principles of Realism Theory, support U.S. vital national security interests, and are achievable.

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INTRODUCTION

Shortly after the attacks of 11 September 2001, President George W. Bush initiated the war in Afghanistan and ordered strikes against al Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime. “Your mission is defined. The objectives are clear. Your goal is just.”¹ President Bush made this statement on 7 October 2001, in his national address from the Treaty Room in the White House. In this speech, he outlined his administration’s clear and concise Afghanistan strategy and introduced the following objectives to America: “...to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime...and bring them to justice.”²

During the last nine years, both the Bush Administration and the Obama Administration adjusted and modified the Afghanistan strategy in order to meet changing national strategic objectives. Unfortunately for the United States, the Bush Administration’s policy, strategy, and objectives for Afghanistan from 2003-2008 were modified as Afghanistan was relegated to a secondary effort. The result of this strategic modification was that only minimal national power and resources were allocated to Afghanistan, as the war in Iraq was elevated to the strategic main effort of the United States. Soon thereafter, the Bush Administration’s strategy in Afghanistan was downgraded to an economy of force counter-terrorism mission. As a result of the national resource shortfalls, the economy of force counter-terrorism strategy in Afghanistan proved ineffective, and the initial successes of 2002-2003 as well as the

¹ President George W. Bush, Remarks, “Mr. Bush on Afghanistan Strikes”, *PBS Online NewsHour*, (October 7, 2001): http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/combating/bush_10-7.html . (accessed 9 March 2011)

² Ibid.

overall security situation deteriorated. This in turn forced the United States under the Obama Administration to transition to a counterinsurgency strategy, focused on attaining security and protecting the Afghan population, while executing lethal counter-terrorism operations against al Qaeda and the Taliban.

President Obama, acting on his campaign promises to withdraw United States forces from Iraq and to focus on succeeding in Afghanistan, shifted the United States' strategic main effort from Iraq back to Afghanistan. Additionally, President Obama approved a longstanding request by Commander, United States Central Command (CDRUSCENTCOM) for an additional thirty thousand forces for Afghanistan, and announced a new comprehensive Afghanistan strategy. In remarks from the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office building on 27 March 2009, he announced his updated policy, strategy, and objectives: 1) deny al Qaeda a safe haven, 2) reverse the Taliban's momentum, 3) deny the Taliban an ability to overthrow the Afghanistan government, and 4) strengthen the capacity of the Afghanistan security forces and government so that they would be able to take lead responsibility³.

Policy, strategy, and objectives are inextricably linked. "Policy ensures that strategy pursues appropriate aims, while strategy informs policy of the art of the possible."⁴ Strategy is secondary to policy. "However, the development of strategy informs policy; policy must adapt itself to the realities of the environment and the limits

³ President Barack Obama, Remarks, "A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan", *The White House, Office of the Press Secretary*, (March 27, 2009): http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/. (accessed 18 February, 2011)

⁴ Harry R. Yarger, *Strategic Theory for the 21st Century: The Little Book on Big Strategy* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2006), 7.

of power.”⁵ “Strategy is all about how leadership will use the power available to the state to exercise control over sets of circumstances and geographic locations to achieve objectives that support state interests.”⁶ Strategy directs power, which is then used to achieve specified objectives through coercion or persuasion. Objectives are selected goals, which lead to the accomplishment of the desired end state.

One year after President Obama delivered his West Point speech, a speech that reaffirmed the United States’ new Afghanistan strategy, the nine year war is faced with increasing weariness within the Congress and among the American people. In their minds, we have been at war in Afghanistan longer than any other war in American history, and it has already cost the taxpayers billions of dollars. They fail to see signs of success, or the conclusion they desire. A 2014 target for transition from United States lead to Afghanistan government and security forces lead appears, to them, to be unreachable. They have doubts about the abilities of the Afghanistan forces to assume security operations. Corruption accusations within President Hamid Karzai’s regime abound. Continuing to fund the war within an economic climate of constrained resources and budgets appears to be unsustainable.

Numerous questions and skepticism are raised about the Afghanistan strategy in media news reports as well as on the internet, in editorials, commentaries, and blogs, about whether the war can be won. Is Afghanistan worth the cost to the American taxpayer? More importantly, is the sacrifice of American service members and the suffering of their families through multiple deployments, injuries, and deaths going to

⁵ Joint Advanced Warfighting School, Strategy ST6300, Strategic Thinking / Strategic Art International Environment, “A Theory of Strategy: Looking Conceptually at Strategic Thinking” briefing slides with scripted commentary, Joint Forces Staff College, October, 2010.

⁶ Ibid.

result in victory? Can the United States' Afghanistan policy, strategy, and objectives be achieved at an acceptable cost in American lives and national treasure? Are the policy, strategy and objectives for Afghanistan in the United States' national interests?

Nations, like individuals, have interests--derived from their innate values and perceived purposes--which motivate their actions. National interests are a nation's perceived needs and aspirations in relation to its international environment. U.S. national interests determine our involvement in the rest of the world. They provide the focus of our actions, and are the starting point for determining national objectives and the formulation of national security policy and strategy. Interests are expressed as desired end states.⁷

It is vital to ascertain the priority, or criticality, of one's national interests. Without prioritization, or levels of importance, it is possible to misdirect precious resources toward the wrong interest. To assist in determining each interest's level of intensity, one needs to ask, what are the consequences (survival, vital, important, or peripheral) to the nation? The Joint Advanced Warfighting School uses the following four levels of intensity:

Survival – If unfulfilled, will result in immediate massive destruction of one or more major aspects of the core national interests.

Vital – If unfulfilled, will have immediate consequences for core national interests

Important – if unfulfilled, will result in damage that will eventually affect core national interests.

Peripheral – If unfulfilled, will result in damage that is unlikely to affect core national interests.

⁷ H. Richard Yarger and George F. Barber. *The U.S. Army War College Methodology for Determining Interests and Levels of Intensity*. Adapted from Department of National Security and Strategy, Directive Course 2: "War, National Policy & Strategy" (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1997) 118-125. <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army-usawc/natinte.htm>. (accessed March 9, 2011)

Utilizing the Realism Theories of Hans J. Morgenthau as a comparative model, this thesis will demonstrate that the current United States national policy, strategy, and objectives for Afghanistan meet the principles of Realism Theory, support U.S. vital national security interests, and are achievable.

BACKGROUND: “HOW WE GOT HERE”

Prior to the analysis that this thesis’ will conduct, the author will recount a brief history of the United States’ Afghanistan policy and strategy, as well as provide an account of the strategic events that led to the United States intervention and continued presence within Afghanistan. In addition, it will review the initiation and execution of the national policies of two different presidential administrations, the first of which lead the United States to enter into Afghanistan in the fall of 2001, as well as the reasons the second continues to engage the United States in the nation’s longest war in its history.

Initial U.S. Afghanistan Policy

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the United States policy and strategy towards the country of Afghanistan was but a small diplomatic effort, which was pursued out of the view of news media and citizens. Few Americans, except for a small number of government employees who were directly involved, seemed to care about Afghanistan, and not many even knew where it was located. During the 1950s, the national interest intensity level was peripheral. The United States provided Afghanistan with an economic assistance program that focused solely on the development of Afghanistan's physical infrastructure—roads, dams, and power plants. In the 1960s the national interest intensity level remained peripheral. The diplomatic effort concentrated on United States foreign assistance in order to develop Afghanistan’s transportation facilities, increase the country’s agricultural production, expand its educational system, stimulate the country’s industry, and improve the government’s administration.

Soviet Invasion, the Mujahedin, and the 1990s

In December 1979, the national interest intensity level rose to important, because the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in order to prop up their puppet communist regime in Kabul. Much of the history of this period is reported in Steve Coll's book, [Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001](#). The following is a synopsis of the events that took place. During the 1980s, the United States supported the global diplomatic efforts to achieve a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, and provided humanitarian assistance and contributions to the Afghanistan refugee program in Pakistan. Following the Soviet invasion, the United States government, through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), provided covert assistance (approximately three billion dollars in military and economic assistance) to Afghan resistance groups known as the "mujahedin". For nearly ten years, the mujahedin waged an American proxy war against the Soviet forces and the Afghan security forces that supported them during the Soviet occupation. During this time, the Soviet populace became increasingly disillusioned with Soviet Afghan policy, the ongoing Soviet military defeats, and the loss of their soldiers. In 1989, the American backed mujahedin defeated the Soviets, and forced a Soviet withdraw of all forces from Afghanistan. Additionally in 1989, the United States minimized its presence in Afghanistan, and the Embassy in Kabul was closed for security reasons.

In April 1992, the Soviet backed Afghan regime in Kabul fell to the mujahedin forces. Without a strong United States presence in Afghanistan, Afghan tribal and factional conflicts escalated and fighting ensued. In the years that followed, various factions of the mujahedin fought each other for control of Afghanistan. In November

1994, the Pashtun dominated Taliban, a group of religious zealots, led by Mullah Omar, seized the key southern city of Kandahar, captured the capital of Kabul, and subsequently overran approximately ninety percent of the country. This left only a small territory in the northeast under Northern Alliance control.

Initially the Taliban were viewed by the United States as a group that could provide some type of stability for the war ravaged country of Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, these hopes were dashed as the Taliban demonstrated a tolerance for Islamic extremists, and aligned itself with Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda organization by beginning to host them. In September of 1996, Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda began using the Taliban controlled Afghanistan as their main base of operations. “The Taliban seemed to open the doors to all who wanted to come to Afghanistan to train in the camps. The alliance with the Taliban provided al Qaeda a sanctuary in which to train and indoctrinate fighters and terrorists, import weapons, forge ties with other jihad groups and leaders, and plot and staff terrorist schemes.”⁸

Throughout the 1990s, while the national interest intensity level remained at important, paramilitary teams, from the Central Intelligence Agency’s Special Activities Division, continued to conduct clandestine operations in Afghanistan. The purpose of these operations was to locate, capture, or kill Osama bin Laden and associates, however, the teams were never given Presidential authority to execute the mission. In August of 1998, after a decade of invisibility, Afghanistan briefly came to the forefront of national awareness in the United States, when President Clinton authorized OPERATION INFINITE REACH – U.S. cruise missile strikes on terrorist bases in Afghanistan - to

⁸ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York: Norton, 2004), 66.

assassinate Osama bin Laden and other key terrorist leaders, in retaliation for their planning and execution of the bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Unfortunately, actions in Afghanistan were short-lived, soon disappearing with the news cycle and other items of interest, to the overall detriment of United States' national security.

Despite thirty years of Afghanistan history that has depicted “years of civil war, conflict, and oppressive rule that included the deaths of over a million people, the displacement of millions more, the proliferation of available weapons, and the destruction of key institutions and infrastructure,”⁹ the bottom-line on modern United States' policy and strategy towards Afghanistan, prior to the attacks of 11 September 2001, was that the United States, except for the Central Intelligence Agency's covert support of the mujahedin against the Soviet forces, has had no real strategy towards Afghanistan. The country of Afghanistan was but a small blip on the United States' Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic, Financial, Intelligence, and Law enforcement radar, except for a small group of diplomats at the Department of State (DOS) who were assigned responsibility for that part of the world, and a group of analysts and operatives at the CIA, who built relationships with Northern Alliance leaders that subsequently proved to be important during the 2001 invasion.

11 September 2001 and the “Bush Doctrine”¹⁰

Following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the national interest level for Afghanistan immediately increased to vital. Afghanistan rapidly ascended to the

⁹ Congressional Research Service, *War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 8.

¹⁰ *Frontline*, “The War Behind Closed Doors,” Chronology: The Evolution of the Bush Doctrine, February 20, 2003 (originally aired February 20, 2003). <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/iraq/etc/cron.html>. (accessed March 15, 2011)

United States' strategic forefront. This activity necessitated the development of a new policy and strategy for Afghanistan. Connections were determined to have existed between the terrorist attacks executed by al Qaeda on the United States, and the locations where al Qaeda had trained and operated in Afghanistan, under Taliban protection. In the days, weeks, and months that followed the attacks of 11 September 2001, the Bush Administration formulated and announced new national policy and strategy towards global terrorism, the terrorist organization al Qaeda, and the country of Afghanistan. President George W. Bush, in his address to the nation on the evening of 11 September 2001, announced cornerstone examples of his Administration's new policy and strategy that would be applied towards global terrorism, al Qaeda, and Afghanistan. These included a tough new policy which seeks to punish not only terrorists, but also those nations which harbor terrorists. That evening President Bush stated, the United States will "make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them."¹¹ Additionally, in a restricted National Security Council (NSC) meeting on the evening of 11 September 2001, the President reinforced his earlier statement to the nation and declared, "the United States would punish not just the perpetrators of the attacks, but also those who harbored them."¹² In a second NSC meeting on 12 September 2001, President Bush "stressed that the United States was at war with a new and different kind of enemy. The President tasked principals to go beyond their pre-9/11 work and develop a strategy to eliminate terrorists and punish those who support them."¹³

¹¹ President George W. Bush, Address to the Nation, (11 September 2001): http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-11/us/bush.speech.text_1_attacks-deadly-terrorist-acts-despicable-acts?s=PM:US. (accessed 12 March 2011)

¹² National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 330.

¹³ Ibid.

Following the attacks of 11 September 2001, the Bush Administration initiated planning, and developed options for the execution of Central Intelligence Agency and military operations against the Taliban regime and al Qaeda within Afghanistan. Several key meetings, including a National Security Council meeting on 13 September 2001, were held leading to the development of these plans for Afghanistan. During the meeting, Central Intelligence Agency Director George Tenet and Counterterrorism Chief Cofer Black presented the Central Intelligence Agency's concept "for bringing together expanded intelligence-gathering resources, sophisticated technology, agency paramilitary teams and opposition forces in Afghanistan in a classic covert action. They would be combined with U.S. military power and Special Forces into an elaborate and lethal package designed to destroy the shadowy terrorist networks."¹⁴ During this same 13 September 2001 National Security Council meeting, the President recognized that, in order to attain the United States' strategic objectives, disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations, and attack the military capability of the Taliban regime, "the United States would have to invade Afghanistan with ground troops."¹⁵

Over the weekend of 15-16 September 2001, President Bush gathered his national security team at Camp David to review and finalize the diplomatic and military plans for Afghanistan. The Director of the Central Intelligence Agency described a plan for collecting intelligence and executing covert operations that would insert "CIA teams into Afghanistan to work with Afghan warlords who would join the fight against al Qaeda. The CIA teams would act jointly with the military's Special Operations units."¹⁶ The Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff briefed a military plan

¹⁴ Bob Woodward, *Bush At War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 50.

¹⁵ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 332

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

that would quickly strike the Taliban utilizing cruise missiles from Navy ships and Air Force planes, manned strategic bombers and strike aircraft, U.S. Special Operations Force teams, and Army and Marines ground forces to attack Taliban targets.

After hearing from the principal national security advisers over the weekend of 15-16 September 2001 and after final discussions with the National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, on the morning of 17 September, President Bush called a National Security Council meeting during which he stated, “the purpose of this meeting is to assign tasks for the first wave of the war against terrorism. It starts today.”¹⁷ The President charged Attorney General Ashcroft, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Mueller, and Central Intelligence Agency Director Tenet to develop a plan for homeland defense. Secretary of State Colin Powell was charged with delivering this ultimatum to the Taliban:

The United States of America makes the following demands on the Taliban:

- 1) Deliver to the United States authorities all the leaders of al Qaeda who hide in your land.
- 2) Release all foreign nationals, including American citizens, you have unjustly imprisoned.
- 3) Protect foreign journalists, diplomats and aid workers in your country.
- 4) Close immediately and permanently every terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, and hand over every terrorist, and every person in their support structure, to appropriate authorities.
- 5) Give the United States full access to terrorist training camps, so we can make sure they are no longer operating.¹⁸

¹⁷ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 333

¹⁸ President George W. Bush, Address to Joint Session of Congress, (20 September, 2001): http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-20/us/gen.bush.transcript_1_joint-session-national-anthem-citizens?s=PM:US. (accessed 12 March 2011)

Simultaneously, the President approved the State Department's plan on a public United States stance from the Department of State paper titled "Game Plan for a Political-Military Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan."¹⁹ "America would use all its resources to eliminate terrorism as a threat, punish those responsible for the 9/11 attacks, hold states and other actors responsible for providing sanctuary to terrorists, work with a coalition to eliminate terrorists groups and networks, and avoid malice toward any people, religion, or culture."²⁰ Following the tasks to the State Department, President Bush approved the Central Intelligence Agency's covert plan proposed by Director Tenet at Camp David, and authorized the CIA "to operate freely and fully in Afghanistan with its own paramilitary teams, case officers, and the newly armed Predator drone."²¹ According to Bob Woodward in his book Bush At War, immediately after tasking CIA, the President directed Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and Chairman Shelton to further develop the military plans briefed to him at Camp David, which were to attack the Taliban and al Qaeda, if the Taliban rejected the U.S. ultimatum. Finally, the President directed Secretary of the Treasury O'Neil to develop and execute a plan that would target and seize al Qaeda's funding and assets.

On 20 September 2001, in a globally televised speech to a Joint Session of Congress, President George W. Bush announced his Administration's new policies and strategies towards global terrorism, the terrorist organization al Qaeda, and the country of Afghanistan. In this unprecedented speech, the President reiterated the ultimatum to the Taliban, "the Taliban must act, and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists,

¹⁹ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 332.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Woodward, *Bush At War*, 101.

or they will share in their fate.”²² President Bush also proclaimed, in no uncertain terms, how the United States would execute the new policy, “we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.”²³ This policy, among other declarations by President Bush, which would later be described as the “Bush Doctrine,”²⁴ established that the United States would use any element of national power to secure itself against countries that harbor or give aid to terrorist groups. The “Bush Doctrine”²⁵ was used to justify the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan.

On 21 September and 2 October 2001, President Bush approved Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld’s and Commander, United States Central Command’s military plans to attack Afghanistan. This action initiated the execution of military operations against the Taliban regime and al Qaeda within Afghanistan. Actual combat operations for OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) commenced on 7 October 2001 because the Taliban regime refused to cease harboring al Qaeda. President George W. Bush, with the authority granted by the U.S. Congress, ordered military strikes on Taliban targets, “with the stated purpose of disrupting the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of

²² Bush, Address to Joint Session of Congress.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ The Bush Doctrine included the policy of preventive war, which held that the United States should depose foreign regimes that represented a potential or perceived threat to the security of the United States, even if that threat was not immediate; a policy of spreading democracy around the world, especially in the Middle East, as a strategy for combating terrorism; and a willingness to unilaterally pursue U.S. military interests. Two main pillars for the doctrine: preemptive strikes against potential enemies and promoting democratic regime change. The Bush Doctrine: Preemption, Military Primacy, New Multilateralism, and the Spread of Democracy. Policies were codified in a National Security Council text entitled, *National Security Strategy of the United States* published September 20, 2002. See “Bush Doctrine”, available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bush_Doctrine. (accessed 9 September 2010)

²⁵ *Frontline*, “The War Behind Closed Doors.

operations and attacking the military capability of the Taliban regime”²⁶ thus commencing the war in Afghanistan. “Military victory, including the demise of the Taliban regime, came quickly. In November 2001, the Taliban fled Kabul, and in December they left their stronghold, the southern city of Kandahar. It is generally understood that in December 2001, key al Qaeda and Taliban leaders fled across the border into Pakistan.”²⁷ Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, “the character of the war in Afghanistan has evolved from a violent struggle against al Qaeda and its Taliban supporters to a multi-faceted counterinsurgency (COIN) effort.”²⁸

Economy of Force Leads to Renewed Taliban Insurgency (Afghanistan 2003 – 2008)

“After quickly ousting the Taliban and its al Qaeda comrades in 2001, the U.S. became preoccupied with Iraq, Afghanistan was ignored, and the enemy returned.”²⁹

“The cause of the uneven application of power in Afghanistan was Iraq.”³⁰

United States’ statements had claimed our national interests in Afghanistan were vital, but our actions there demonstrated otherwise. Unfortunately, our strategy and objectives for Afghanistan from 2003-2008 were not the priority of the nation, and therefore they were modified, as Afghanistan was relegated to a secondary effort. Although the United States built a coalition of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies as partners, only minimal United States combat power and capabilities were allocated to the Afghanistan Theater. This was the result of the war in Iraq being elevated, within national interests, to the strategic main effort of the United States.

²⁶ Congressional Research Service, 9.

²⁷ Ibid, 10.

²⁸ Ibid., Summary.

²⁹ Colonel Jack Jacobs, “General Petraeus Gives a War Briefing”, *Parade*, November 29, 2009, http://www.parade.com/articles/editions/2009/edition_11-29-2009/General-Petraeus.html. (accessed 28 November 2010)

³⁰ Stephen F. Hayes, “Robert Gates On Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq, And The Defense Budget,” *WeeklyStandard.com*, February 23, 2011.

“Since major combat operations in 2001, the United States military has maintained a distinct special operations forces (SOF) presence in Afghanistan...”³¹ enhanced by United States conventional forces, Central Intelligence Agency operatives, United States government interagency task forces and subject matter experts, and coalition special and conventional forces. Unfortunately, the presence of this under-allocated, joint United States and combined international counter-terrorism force could not prevent the reemergence of the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Additionally, it could not effectively support the Government Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) in its infancy, foster the support of the Afghanistan population, or train the Afghanistan military and police security forces to meet U.S. and international expectations.

After evading the United States and coalition forces, the remnants of the Taliban and al Qaeda reorganized and reconstituted their forces along the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan, to which their leaders had previously escaped. In this region, they designed a guerilla warfare campaign against the GIROA and the supporting international coalition. The Taliban and al Qaeda launched numerous counter offensives that targeted the isolated outposts and convoys of the Afghan Army and police. Additionally, they coordinated a strategy to attack Afghan government infrastructure and leaders, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), humanitarian assistance workers, and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) coalition forces via improvised explosive devices (IEDs), raids, ambushes, and rocket attacks.

Unfortunately during this six year period in Afghanistan, “The Bush Administration tried to combat the al-Qaeda threat with limited numbers of U.S. and NATO troops, targeted strikes against militants, and broad, mostly ineffective, aid

³¹ Congressional Research Service, 20.

programs. It provided large sums of money to the Pakistani Army, with few strings attached, in the hope that action would be taken against terrorist camps near the Afghan border. The strategy failed: The Taliban has only grown stronger, and both the Afghan and Pakistani governments are dangerously weak.”³² Instead of being focused on clear and concise ways of utilizing national resources to achieve the desired strategic ends, the United States’ policy, strategy, and objectives for Afghanistan became mired in an under-allocated theater. The challenge became executing counter-terrorism operations while simultaneously being involved in a “multifaceted counterinsurgency effort aimed at smothering the diffuse insurgency by shoring up the Government Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) efforts to provide security, governance, and economic development.”³³ Basically, the United States was trying to accomplish too much with too little.

With the Bush Administration transitioning and drawing to a close, President-elect Obama would soon be saddled with the Afghanistan challenge. He had long contended that Afghanistan and Pakistan were “the epicenter of the violent extremism practiced by al Qa’ida”³⁴ and were the ultimate areas of concern for United States national security. Afghanistan and Pakistan would become his Administration’s national security interest priority.

³² Editorial Board, “The Price of Realism”, *The Washington Post*, March 28, 2009.

³³ Congressional Research Service, Summary.

³⁴ President of the United States, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, May 2010), 20.

CHAPTER 1: REALISM, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY, AND THE WEINBERGER-POWELL DOCTRINE

Before considering whether the United States' policy, strategy and objectives in Afghanistan meet the principles of Realism Theory, a summary of Hans J. Morgenthau's realism theories, from his book Politics Among Nations, The Struggle for Power and Peace, and a synopsis of the corollaries from the modern American realism doctrines of Secretaries Casper Weinberger and Colin Powell are necessary.

Hans J. Morgenthau

To be able to develop a rational theory for realism, facts must be gathered and a “rational outline” needs to be developed. This outline should be based on observing the situation through the circumstances of a leader who is facing a challenge and must make a decision. Assuming the leader acts in a reasonable manner, one can predict which of many rational choices he is most likely to select. Referencing history we are able to observe the steps taken by previous statesmen. Realism assumes “that statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power, and the evidence of history bears that assumption out.”¹ Human nature never changes. In a commonly quoted phrase attributed to George Santayana, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Morgenthau states “retrace and anticipate” by which he means, study “the steps of a statesman – past, present, or future – has taken or will take on the political scene. We look over his shoulder when he writes his dispatches; we listen in on his conversations

¹ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. 6th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 5.

with other statesmen; we read and anticipate his very thoughts...we understand his thoughts and actions...better than he...does himself.”²

In his book Politics Among Nations, The Struggle for Power and Peace, Hans J. Morgenthau lays out six principles of political realism.

1. Political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature.³

In order to apply this rule, one must be able to tell the difference between truth, which involves determining facts on a matter, and opinion, which can be influenced by prejudice. “Politics is governed by human nature.”⁴ Morgenthau tells us that human nature has not changed in the hundreds and thousands of years that have passed since the classical philosophers of the ancient civilizations discerned them and wrote them down. On this matter, Thucydides captured the essence of human nature when he stated, “to understand clearly the events that happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will, at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future.”⁵ Hans J. Morgenthau echoed Thucydides, and reinforced Thucydides’ position within his first principle of realism theory, when Morgenthau stated that, “the laws of politics have their roots”⁶ in human nature.

2. The main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power.⁷

² Morgenthau, 5.

³ Ibid, 4.

⁴ Paul Melshen, “International Relations Theory,” Policy Making, and the Decision to Use Force,” briefing slides with scripted commentary, Joint Advanced Warfighting School, Joint Forces Staff College, National Defense University, VA, 10 September, 2010.

⁵ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 48.

⁶ Morgenthau, 4.

⁷ Ibid, 5.

Within this rule is contained “the link between reason trying to understand international politics and the facts to be understood.”⁸ By eliminating thought related to subjects such as ideology, ethics, and religion, political realism can be the primary focus of power as a national interest. One’s “Interests gained through power.”⁹ Morgenthau captured the essence of “power” in his book’s third chapter when he stated,

Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim. Statesmen and peoples may ultimately seek freedom, security, prosperity, or power itself. They may define their goals in terms of a religious, philosophic, economic, or social ideal. They may hope that this ideal will materialize through its own inner force, through divine intervention, or through the natural development of human affairs. They may also try to further its realization through nonpolitical means, such as technical co-operation with other nations or international organizations. But whenever they strive to realize their goal by means of international politics, they do so by striving for power.”¹⁰

Realism in action provides rational discipline and continuity, and “will guard against two popular fallacies: the concern with motives and the concern with ideological preferences.”¹¹ “Realism,” or the term used by Henry Kissinger in his book Diplomacy, “Realpolitik – a foreign policy based on calculations of power and the national interest,”¹² is about attaining and maintaining national interests through the utilization of national power.

3. Realism assumes that its key concept of interest defined as power is an objective category which is universally valid, but it does not endow that concept with a meaning that is fixed once and for all.¹³

⁸ Morgenthau, 4.

⁹ Melshen, “International Relations Theory”.

¹⁰ Morgenthau, 31.

¹¹ Ibid, 5.

¹² Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 137.

¹³ Morgenthau, 10.

“Power may comprise anything that establishes and maintains the control of man over man.”¹⁴ This can be established either in its bridled form disciplined by rule of law, and managed and controlled by the constitutional guarantees demonstrated in western democracies, or in its raw, unbridled, undisciplined, and barbaric form demonstrated by areas where power is fractured to the likes of Somalia, or within some of the gang dominated urban areas of America, where every man is attempting to assert his own dominance. Power is defined by interests. This was known as early as Thucydides, who stated “identity of interests is the surest of bonds whether between states or individuals.”¹⁵ Morgenthau reinforced Thucydides position by stating, “interests...not ideas, dominate directly the actions of men.”¹⁶ Realists understand that power is defined by interests and that power is the domination of man over man including physical violence and mind control. However, realists also understand that there are “Limits of Power.”¹⁷

4. Political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action. It is aware of the ineluctable tension between the moral command and the requirements of successful political action. And it is unwilling to gloss over and obliterate that tension and thus to obfuscate both the moral and the political issue by making it appear as though the stark facts of politics were morally more satisfying than they actually are, and moral law less exacting than it actually is.¹⁸

An example of Morgenthau’s fourth principle would be how the United States continues to support Afghan President Hamid Karzai and the corruption within his administration. In this instance, the United States has determined that it is worth the risk

¹⁴ Morgenthau, 11.

¹⁵ Ibid, 10.

¹⁶ Ibid, 11.

¹⁷ Melshen, “International Relations Theory”.

¹⁸ Morgenthau, 12.

to continue to work with President Karzai as the leader and power in place within Afghanistan in order to attain our national interests. Another example of Morgenthau's fourth principle would be the events in Egypt during the spring of 2011. Referencing the United States thirty year strategy with regard to Egypt and Egyptian President Mubarak. Mubarak's foreign policies ensured regional stability, although his domestic policies did not always meet moral western standards. In both examples, Realism, "filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place,"¹⁹ works with the power that exists, albeit not perfect if that power meets your national interests, because mutual interests take precedence over moral significance.

There is a "[d]ifference between moral command and successful political action"²⁰ that must be considered by both the individual and the state. It is understood that liberty is a universal moral principle, "[y]et while the individual has a moral right to sacrifice himself in defense of such a moral principle, the state has no right to let its moral disapprobation of the infringement of liberty get in the way of successful political action, itself inspired by the moral principle of national survival."²¹ As E.H. Carr stated in his book The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939, "[p]olitics are made up of two elements – utopia and reality – belonging to two different planes which can never meet. There is no greater barrier to clear political thinking than failure to distinguish between ideals, which are utopia, and institutions, which are reality."²² Realism and prudent actions go hand in hand, weighing the political consequences of national interests against

¹⁹ Morgenthau, 12.

²⁰ Melshen, "International Relations Theory".

²¹ Morgenthau, 12.

²² Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 93.

moralistic and idealistic adventures, thus preempting disasters and preserving national survival.

5. Political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe.²³

It is not in the national interest of our nation or any other “to pretend to know with certainty what is good and evil in the relations among nations....”²⁴ The “[d]ifference between moral aspirations and universal laws”²⁵ tells us that national interests are unrelated to the belief that God favors one nation over another. “The lighthearted equation between a particular nationalism and the counsels of Providence is morally indefensible....”²⁶ Rather than being blind, crusading zealots, a nation must pursue moderation in “policies that respect the interests of other nations, while protecting and promoting those of our own.”²⁷

6. The difference, then, between political realism and other schools of thought is real, and it is profound.”²⁸ “...the political realist maintains the autonomy of the political sphere.”²⁹ “He thinks in terms of interest defined as power.”³⁰

“One’s national interests are what is critical.”³¹ The main question to be asked in all situations is, “[h]ow does this policy affect the power of the nation?”³² The political realist accepts the existence of spheres outside of politics such as, economics, law, and morals, but when considering national actions, the realist subordinates the other spheres and focuses solely on the political sphere in the form of national interests. However,

²³ Morgenthau, 13.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Melshen, “International Relations Theory”.

²⁶ Morgenthau, 13.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Melshen, “International Relations Theory”.

³² Morgenthau, 12.

politics does not exist in a vacuum. The political realist must be able to utilize other spheres in order to attain the national interest.

An example of Morgenthau's sixth principle would be how President George W. Bush utilized the moralistic sphere of international support and invoked the legalistic sphere from the United Nations Security Council Resolution, NATO Article 5, and U.S. Congressional authorization for the use of force against al Qaeda, in order to attain and protect U.S. national interests within Afghanistan following the attacks of 11 September 2001. Another example of this principle would be the United States' reaction to the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces in August of 1990. In this instance, President George H. W. Bush also utilized the moralistic and legalistic spheres in order to obtain a United Nations Security Council Resolution condemning Iraqi aggression on Kuwait, while simultaneously building an international coalition of support for Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. While moralistic and legalistic reasons were certainly true and appropriately applied in both examples, the United States' primary concern was its own national interests in expelling Iraqi forces from Kuwait and defeating al Qaeda in Afghanistan.

Bottom-line, political realism is hard. National survival stands above all else.

...the human mind in its day-by-day operations cannot bear to look the truth of politics straight in the face. It must disguise, distort, belittle, and embellish the truth-the more so, the more the individual is actively involved in the process of politics, and particularly in those of international politics. For only by deceiving himself about the nature of politics and the role he plays on the political scene is man able to live contentedly as a political animal with himself and his fellow men.³³

The realism theory of Hans J. Morgenthau influenced the development of two modern American realist doctrines on national interests. Developed by former Secretary

³³ Morgenthau, 15.

of Defense Casper Weinberger and former Secretary of State Colin Powell, together they have become known as the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine. Introduced on 28 November 1984 at the National Press Club in Washington D.C., the speech titled “The Uses of Military Power” was delivered by Secretary of Defense, Casper Weinberger. He introduced “...six major tests to be applied when we are weighing the use of U.S. combat forces abroad.”³⁴ These tests were:

The Weinberger Doctrine:

First, the United States should not commit forces to combat overseas unless the particular engagement or occasion is deemed vital to our national interest or that of our allies.³⁵

Second, if we decide it is necessary to put combat troops into a given situation, we should do so wholeheartedly, and with the clear intention of winning. If we are unwilling to commit the forces or resources necessary to achieve our objectives, we should not commit them at all. Of course if the particular situation requires only limited force to win our objectives, then we should not hesitate to commit forces sized accordingly.³⁶

Third, if we do decide to commit forces to combat overseas, we should have clearly defined political and military objectives. And we should know precisely how our forces can accomplish those clearly defined objectives. And we should have and send the forces needed to do just that. As Clausewitz wrote, "no one starts a war -- or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so -- without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war, and how he intends to conduct it."³⁷

Fourth, the relationship between our objectives and the forces we have committed -- their size, composition and disposition -- must be continually reassessed and adjusted if necessary. Conditions and objectives invariably change during the course of a conflict. When they do change, then so must our combat requirements. We must continuously keep as a beacon light before us the basic questions: "is this conflict in our national interest?"

³⁴ Honorable Casper W. Weinberger, “The Uses of Military Power” (speech, National Press Club, Washington D.C., November 28, 1984). <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/military/force/weinberger.html>. (accessed 10 September 2010)

³⁵ Casper W. Weinberger, *Fighting For Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1990), 441.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

"Does our national interest require us to fight, to use force of arms?" If the answers are "yes", then we must win. If the answers are "no," then we should not be in combat.³⁸

Fifth, before the U.S. commits combat forces abroad, there must be some reasonable assurance we will have the support of the American people and their elected representatives in Congress. This support cannot be achieved unless we are candid in making clear the threats we face; the support cannot be sustained without continuing and close consultation. We cannot fight a battle with the Congress at home while asking our troops to win a war overseas or, as in the case of Vietnam, in effect asking our troops not to win, but just to be there.³⁹

Finally, the commitment of U.S. forces to combat should be a last resort.⁴⁰

The Weinberger policies were developed through analysis of the tragic 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, which had greatly affected Secretary Weinberger, in order to establish tests to prevent the United States from committing military forces upon moralistic adventures, or imprecise purposes, instead of only committing forces in the defense of our vital national interests. As Secretary Weinberger stated, "...by what means, does a great democracy such as ours reach the painful decision that the use of military force is necessary to protect our interests or to carry out our national policy?"⁴¹

Although primarily focused on the uses of military power, these tests are tied directly to Morgenthau's theory of realism as applied to national interests and power. "These tests can help us to avoid being drawn inexorably into an endless morass, where it is not vital to our national interest to fight."⁴² Additionally, "[o]nce it is clear our troops are required, because our vital interests are at stake, then we must have the firm national

³⁸ Ibid., 442.

³⁹ Weinberger, *Fighting For Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon*, 442.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Weinberger, "The Uses of Military Power".

⁴² Ibid.

resolve to commit every ounce of strength necessary to win the fight to achieve our objectives.”⁴³ Casper Weinberger presented his tests for “the uses of military power” in a negative light in order to “...sound a note of caution”⁴⁴ which he felt was, “... not only prudent, it is morally required.”⁴⁵ “Realism, then, considers prudence...to be the supreme virtue in politics.”⁴⁶

Secretary Weinberger goes into greater detail on the subject of realism theory in his book, Fighting For Peace. He regarded national interests as most critical, and national power and the pursuit of power as the principle by which to attain ones interests. “The fight for peace is never over, unlike some of the wars in which we have engaged. Certainly, we will have to fight another of those wars in the future, unless we keep ourselves strong, and unless we are really willing to fight for peace in peacetime.”⁴⁷ He continued this vein by stating, “[b]ut maintaining that readiness and that resolve is difficult, and is widely viewed as unpopular and a largely unrewarding task.”⁴⁸ He believed, that in order to attain ones national interests, i.e. fight for peace and maintain the peace, the United States must possess the power to dominate the peace, which “...requires large and continuous investments to keep our military strong, modern, and ready, so that no country, or combination of countries, can ever feel they can make a successful attack upon us.”⁴⁹

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Weinberger, “The Uses of Military Power”.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Morgenthau, 12.

⁴⁷ Weinberger, *Fighting For Peace*, 429.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

As a realist, Secretary of Defense Weinberger accepted the truth of national “[p]ower and the pursuit of Power”⁵⁰ being the only method to attain ones national interests, but also realized that “[a]ll power is limited.”⁵¹ He believed that “[t]he nation-state is the principal player in the international system”⁵² but that “the international system is anarchical”⁵³ because nations, as human nature dictates, act in their own self-interests. So for a nation to attain its interests and maintain “[p]ower and the [b]alance of [p]ower”⁵⁴ within the “[m]ultiple forms of polity exist in the international system,”⁵⁵ Secretary Weinberger believed one must make alliances when he stated, “[c]learly, no nation is strong enough alone to keep its own freedom. Every nation requires alliances, friendships or associations of one kind or another with other countries who share its goals and ideals. That truth certainly applies to the United States. So we must make major efforts to secure those alliances....”⁵⁶ When making alliances, Secretary Weinberger understood Morgenthau’s fourth principle of political realism, that there will be tension between nations based on morals and “successful political action.” He stated, “...keep strong friendships with many nations, some of which may not always follow precisely the path that we would wish them to follow.”⁵⁷ In this statement, he accepted that some policies of certain alliances would not meet western moral standards but that in order to attain ones national interests, one must work with the power that exists, because mutual interests take precedence over moral significance.

⁵⁰ Melshen, “International Relations Theory”.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Melshen, “International Relations Theory”.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Weinberger, *Fighting For Peace*, 430.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

It is Morgenthau's realism principles that Secretary Weinberger exercised when he stated, "[k]eeping our peace also requires that we fight the tendency to believe what we want to believe, on the basis of some hopeful or soothing rhetoric..."⁵⁸ By making this statement, Secretary Weinberger, an emotionally contained man, asserted that he recognized, but does not take into account the facets, ideology, morals, religion, or rhetoric when it comes to national interests. Realists consider only interests defined as national power because it is the "concept of interests defined in terms of power that saves us from moral excess and political folly."⁵⁹

In his book's conclusion, Secretary Weinberger commented that national survival must be above all else when he stated,

Our survival will ever depend upon how much importance we attach to peace and to our freedoms...We need not change our personality as a nation, nor any of the qualities that make democracy so enormously valuable and the people who live in a democracy the most fortunate on the earth. But we must understand how critically important it is, if we want to keep our democracy, our peace, and our freedom, that we be willing to make sacrifices – sacrifices often difficult, expensive, and unpopular. Wise and resolute investment in our military strength is not only quite consistent with all of the blessings of democracy; it is the only course that will let us keep our democracy, our peace and our freedom. If we want peace, we must be willing and able to fight for it.⁶⁰

The doctrine developed by Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, made a strong impression upon General (Ret.), former Secretary of State, Colin Powell, who served as his Senior Military Assistant in the 1980s. In his book, My American Journey, Colin Powell makes reference to Secretary of Defense Weinberger and his tests when he stated that Weinberger, "...was put off by fancy phrases like "interpositional forces" and "presence" that turned out to mean putting U.S. troops in harm's way without a clear

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Morgenthau, 11.

⁶⁰ Weinberger, *Fighting For Peace*, 431.

mission. He objected to our troops being “used” in the worst sense of that word. He had come up with six tests for determining when to commit American forces.”⁶¹

Secretary Powell formulated his realism doctrine from his collective lessons learned from the Vietnam War, and from his personal experiences at the strategic level in Washington D.C. While inside “the Beltway”, Colin Powell, like Secretary Weinberger, developed “a strong distaste for the antiseptic phrases coined by the State Department officials for foreign interventions which usually had bloody consequences for the military...”⁶² The problem, as Powell stated, with bland “...words like “presence”, “symbol”, “signal”, “option on the table”, “establishment of credibility” was that their use was fine if beneath them lay a solid mission. But too often these words were used to give the appearance of clarity to mud.”⁶³ Within this statement, Colin Powell demonstrated his direct linkage to the Weinberger Doctrine test three by stating that American forces should not be committed into any situation unless there was a clear defined mission.

Secretary Powell echoed Secretary Weinberger and the realist theories of Hans J. Morgenthau regarding the concept of national interests and the use of prudence to rescue us from “moral excess and political folly”⁶⁴ when he stated, “...well-meaning Americans thought we should “do something”..., the shattered bodies of Marines at the Beirut airport were never far from my mind in arguing caution.”⁶⁵ He continued in greater depth regarding realism theory and the concept of national interests as most critical when he stated, “There are times when American lives must be risked and lost. Foreign policy

⁶¹ Colin L. Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 303.

⁶² Powell with Persico, 291.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Morgenthau, 11.

⁶⁵ Powell with Persico, 291.

cannot be paralyzed by the prospect of casualties. But lives must not be risked until we can face a parent or a spouse or a child with a clear answer to the question of why a member of that family had to die. To provide a “symbol” or “a presence” is not good enough.”⁶⁶ By making this statement, Secretary Powell demonstrated his direct association with, and belief in Weinberger Doctrine tests one and two, those being that the U.S. should not commit forces to combat unless vital national interests are involved and that U.S. troops should only be committed with a clear intention of winning.

During his time in service as the Senior Military Advisor to the Secretary of Defense, National Security Advisor to President Reagan, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under President George H. W. Bush, Secretary Powell expounded and expanded on the tests of the Weinberger Doctrine in which he fully believed.

The lessons I absorbed...confirmed all my convictions over the preceding twenty years,...Have a clear political objective and stick to it. Use all the force necessary, and do not apologize for going in big if that is what it takes. Decisive force ends wars quickly and in the long run saves lives. Whatever threats we faced in the future, I intended to make these rules the bedrock of my military counsel.⁶⁷

Colin Powell produced a list of questions which had to be answered in the affirmative prior to the United States committing military forces. This list came to be known as the Powell Doctrine and is summarized below:

The Powell Doctrine:⁶⁸

1. Is a vital national security interest threatened?
2. Do we have a clear attainable objective?

⁶⁶ Powell with Persico, 292.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 434.

⁶⁸ The "Powell Doctrine" is a journalist-created term, named after General Colin Powell. It is based in large part on the Weinberger Doctrine, devised by Caspar Weinberger, former Secretary of Defense and Powell's former boss. The Powell Doctrine states that a list of questions all have to be answered affirmatively before military action is taken by the United States. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Powell_Doctrine (accessed 9 September 2010)

3. Have the risks and costs been fully and frankly analyzed?
4. Have all other non-violent policy means been fully exhausted?
5. Is there a plausible exit strategy to avoid endless entanglement?
6. Have the consequences of our action been fully considered?
7. Is the action supported by the American people?
8. Do we have genuine broad international support?⁶⁹

The Doctrine denotes that when all the other elements of national power (Diplomatic, Information, Economic, Financial, Intelligence, and Law enforcement) have been exhausted, then and only then, should a nation resort to “Military” force. Once a nation commits to military action, that nation must utilize every resource and tool available in order to gain a decisive power advantage over the enemy, thus minimizing casualties, and ending the conflict quickly by forcing the enemy to capitulate.

As Secretary Powell said during a 1 April 2009 interview on *The Rachel Maddow Show*, “I think the Powell Doctrine is pretty good military strategy and I’m proud to have a doctrine named after me that really is classic military thought. Decide what you are trying to achieve politically and if it can’t be achieved through political and diplomatic and economic means, and you have to use military force, then make sure you know exactly what you’re using the military force for and then apply it in a decisive manner.”⁷⁰ Secretary Powell is also recognized for a corollary known as the “Pottery Barn rule.” This rule cautioned that when national power is utilized abroad, one must be aware that,

⁶⁹ Colin L. Powell, “U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead,” *Foreign Affairs*, 72, no. 5 (Winter 1992/93): 38.

⁷⁰ Colin Powell, interview by Rachel Maddow, *The Rachel Maddow Show*, MSNBC, April 1, 2009.

“once you break it, you are going to own it...”⁷¹ Realism theory of caution and prudence is now stated in American jargon as “you break it, you buy it.”

⁷¹ NO BYLINE Writer, “Ideas and Consequences,” *The Atlantic.com*, October 2007, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/10/ideas-and-consequences/6193/>. (accessed 17 February, 2011)

CHAPTER 2: CURRENT AFGHANISTAN STRATEGY

“Political purpose dominates all strategy”¹ “Political purpose is stated in policy”²

Policy is the clear guidance for the employment of the instruments of national power; Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic (DIME), towards the accomplishment of desired objectives or end states. United States foreign policies and theater strategies adjust as presidential administrations modify their national “Ends” (objectives or goals) and “Ways” (strategy), based on limited “Means” (resources) within the realities of the strategic environment (both external and domestic) and the limits of national power. “Thus, policy ensures that strategy pursues appropriate aims, while strategy informs policy of the art of the possible.”³

President Barack Obama - Afghanistan Strategy Review – January 2009

“Afghanistan is going to be his war.”⁴

‘In Afghanistan, as President George W. Bush announced last September, U.S. troop levels are rising, with the likelihood of more increases in the year ahead. Given its terrain, poverty, neighborhood, and tragic history, Afghanistan in many ways poses an even more complex and difficult long-term challenge than Iraq—one that, despite a large international effort, will require a significant U.S. military and economic commitment for some time.’⁵

Prior to his inauguration in January of 2009, President elect Obama asked Vice President Elect Biden and Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) to visit Afghanistan and Pakistan in order to put together an initial strategic assessment of the United States’ policy, strategy, and objectives in Afghanistan. Following the trip, Senator Lindsey

¹ Yarger, *Strategic Theory for the 21st Century*, 6.

² Ibid, 7.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bob Woodward, *Obama’s War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 63.

⁵ Robert M. Gates, “A Balanced Strategy: Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age,” *Foreign Affairs*, 88, no. 1 (January/February 2009):28.

Graham provided President elect Obama with his assessment, “Mr. President, we’re losing this battle, your assessment of the importance of Afghanistan is dead-on. And your assessment of we’ve taken our eye off the ball is right.”⁶ Vice President-elect Biden also provided President elect Obama with his assessment of Afghanistan and Pakistan by stating, “if you ask ten of our people what we’re trying to accomplish here, you get ten different answers...this has been on autopilot.”⁷ President-elect Obama’s response to Senator Graham’s and Vice President-elect Biden’s assessments on Afghanistan and Pakistan were, “we can’t be on autopilot. We need to get a grip on this and that’s going to be the first order of business.”⁸ This statement set the stage for how President-elect Obama’s administration would conduct a strategic review of the policy, strategy, and objectives in order to lay out a new strategy for Afghanistan.

During his inauguration speech on 20 January 2009, President Obama laid out his initial vision for completing the mission in Iraq and transitioning the United States’ strategic main effort to Afghanistan by stating, “We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan.”⁹

On 23 January 2009, President Obama presided over his first National Security Council meeting on Afghanistan. In this meeting, President Obama announced that United States foreign policy in Afghanistan would be analyzed and reoriented. He stated, “I have campaigned on providing Afghanistan with more troops but I haven’t made the decision yet...when we send them, we need to announce it in the context of a broader

⁶ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 73.

⁷ Ibid, 72.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ President Barack Hussein Obama, Inaugural Address, *The White House, Office of the Press Secretary*, (January 21, 2009): <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address/>. (accessed 7 March, 2011)

strategy.”¹⁰ Within this Presidential statement are links to test numbers one, three, and five of the Weinberger Doctrine, which state that the U.S. should not commit forces to combat unless the vital national interests of the U.S. or its allies are involved, U.S. combat troops should be committed only with clearly defined political and military objectives and with the capacity to accomplish those objectives, and that U.S. troops should not be committed to battle without a “reasonable assurance” of the support of the American people.

Over the previous couple of months, General Petraeus, Commander, United States Central Command, Admiral Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Lieutenant General Lute, Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor for Iraq and Afghanistan, also known by the informal expression of “War Czar”, had compiled or were compiling their own strategic reviews of Afghanistan and Pakistan. During the 23 January 2009 National Security Council meeting, the President decided that all the ongoing or completed strategic reviews would be brought together and presented to the National Security Council because the President believed that, at that time, no coherent strategy existed for the Afghanistan and Pakistan Theater.

President Obama, acknowledging the fact that United States forces had already been committed by the Bush Administration for the past eight years, knew he needed to return to the realistic premise of the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine before approving additional forces and explaining that action to the American people. The President believed that “the ultimate strategy must explain the logic for adding more troops and show how the fight would be carried out going forward. I’ve got to lay this out to the

¹⁰ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 79.

American public...the Afghanistan War would be a priority.”¹¹ By making this statement to the National Security Council, President Obama provided his strategic guidance, thereby linking his Administration’s Afghanistan strategy review and any new U.S. strategy for Afghanistan to the realist theories of Hans J. Morgenthau and the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine. It can be presumed that President Obama is a realist, as realism theory is heard throughout his statements to the National Security Council on 23 January 2009. Observe the linkage of his NSC statements above to Secretary Weinberger’s test numbers one, two, and five, that state: The United States should not commit forces to combat unless the vital national interests of the U.S. or its allies are involved, U.S. troops should only be committed wholeheartedly and with the clear intention of winning, and U.S. troops should not be committed to battle without a “reasonable assurance” of the support of U.S. public opinion and Congress. And observe the linkage of his NSC statements above to Secretary Powell’s list of questions, numbers one, two, six, and seven, that state: [i]s a vital national security interest threatened?, [d]o we have a clear attainable objective?, [h]ave the consequences of our action been fully considered?, and [i]s the action supported by the American people? These realist principles of both Weinberger and Powell are all seen within the Presidential statements to the NSC.

During the 23 January 2009 National Security Council meeting, General David Petraeus warned, “this is going to be very difficult. It is going to get harder, much harder before it gets easier.”¹² He made this cautionary statement because, as the former Commander of Multi-National Forces Iraq (MNF-I), he had not only implemented the

¹¹ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 80.

¹² *Ibid.*

ultimately successful United States force surge that supported the Iraq counterinsurgency operations, but also, he had experienced and learned many strategic lessons from fighting against the Iraq insurgency. He emphasized “[w]e cannot achieve our objectives without more troops.”¹³ Committing the amount of forces necessary to accomplish the objectives is a prime precept of both the Weinberger and Powell Doctrines.

As the supported geographic combatant commander for the Afghanistan Theater, Commander, United States Central Command, General Petraeus, believed that the ultimate objective of the Afghanistan strategy “was to prevent Afghanistan from again becoming a sanctuary for transnational extremists such as al Qaeda.”¹⁴ This statement by General Petraeus would become a key element within the new Afghanistan strategy and would be included within the President’s remarks on “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan”¹⁵ in March of 2009 and reiterated during the President’s speech at West Point in December of 2009. Finally, General Petraeus’ statement to the NSC would be included as part of the National Security Strategy (NSS) upon its release in May of 2010. General Petraeus also stated to the President and the National Security Council, “[y]ou can’t just do counterterrorism with drone strikes and infantry raids, you have to do counterinsurgency to stabilize the country and that is a whole host of tasks. American soldiers had to protect Afghans. The local government must deliver services to the people. And the Afghan National Army and National Police need to expand in size.”¹⁶ Those statements, made by General Petraeus at the 23 January 2009 National Security

¹³ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 80.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ President Barack Obama, “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan,” *The White House, Office of the Press Secretary*, March 27, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/ (accessed 18 February, 2011)

¹⁶ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 80.

Council meeting, would eventually be adopted as the method by which the United States would implement its new Afghanistan and Pakistan strategy, and would ultimately be presented by the Commander in Chief to the American people via his speeches in March and December of 2009, as well as within the May 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS). Commander, United States Central Command, concluded his comments to the President and the National Security Council by stating, “the U.S. should fulfill McKiernan’s (Commander, International Security Assistance Force – ISAF and Commander, United States Forces Afghanistan-USFOR-A) pending request for 30,000 more troops.”¹⁷ General Petraeus made this statement because he knew that in order to carry out a counterinsurgency strategy, a manpower intense effort, the commander on the ground would require additional forces to meet the forthcoming strategic objectives nested within the forthcoming new strategy. As stated earlier, committing the amount of forces necessary to accomplish the objectives, is a prime precept of both the Weinberger and Powell Doctrines.

According to Bob Woodward, in his book Obama’s War, former Army vice chief, General (Ret) Jack Keane “known as the father of the Iraq surge”¹⁸ also played a large part in the development of the new Afghanistan strategy. He had been an effective “behind the scenes” promoter of the 30,000-man surge in Iraq, and also of the man who would become the Iraq Theater Commander and eventually assume leadership at Central Command, General David Petraeus. Having seen the same problems in Afghanistan that had compelled him to push for strategy changes in Iraq, General Keane initiated contact with the new Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. General Keane told Secretary Clinton,

¹⁷ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 80.

¹⁸ Ibid, 82.

“the strategy in Afghanistan is wrong...and not only that, but the leadership is wrong.”¹⁹

General McKiernan, the Afghanistan commander, preferred more conventional operations, a counterterrorism approach that was designed to kill Taliban fighters.

“[c]ounterterrorism would not be decisive...it hadn’t been quite enough in Iraq.”²⁰

General Keane also stated “[t]he only way out of Afghanistan, was an intensive counterinsurgency geared toward protecting Afghans.”²¹ This meant that, “the U.S. must help establish an Afghan government that the people endorse, a government capable of maintaining peace.”²² Since the Afghanistan Government was weak, the Taliban insurgency provided a substitute to the government that could provide some security and stability. “Failure to perform a textbook counterinsurgency would doom the U.S. mission.”²³

Ten days into President Obama’s new administration, the President contacted an old friend who had once been an undercover CIA operative and had previously served as an advisor to candidate Obama as a South Asia team leader. Bruce Riedel, knowledgeable about Islamic extremism, al Qaeda, and the countries of Pakistan and Afghanistan, would be tasked with conducting a strategic review for the President on Afghanistan and Pakistan. As part of the strategic review, President Obama requested Mr. Riedel to define what the United States’ purpose was and to state the goal for success in Afghanistan.

During his Afghanistan strategic review, Bruce Riedel, through detailed analysis, determined the following: First, in a complete change from the previous administration,

¹⁹ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 82.

²⁰ Ibid, 83.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

“the U.S. would confront Afghanistan and Pakistan as two countries but one challenge: AfPak.”²⁴ Second, he defined for the President and stated both the United States’ purpose and goals, “to disrupt, dismantle, and eventually defeat al Qaeda and its extremist allies, their support structures, and their safe havens in Pakistan and to prevent their return to Pakistan or Afghanistan.”²⁵ He further recommended that the United States should:

- 1) Execute and resource an integrated civilian-military “comprehensive counterinsurgency.”²⁶
- 2) Increase the Afghanistan Army during the next two years.
- 3) Deploy 4000 additional trainers for the Afghanistan Army.
- 4) Immediately reverse the Taliban’s momentum.

In March of 2009, Bruce Riedel traveled to California with President Obama aboard Air Force One. During the trip Mr. Riedel had the opportunity to brief the President, one on one, and he reiterated his strategy review recommendations providing this cautionary intelligence warning, “...during the campaign I told you that al Qaeda was as dangerous now as they were on the 10th of September, 2001. After a review of the intelligence...it turns out that I was underestimating the danger.”²⁷ This statement by Bruce Riedel is a direct link to realism theory and the Weinberger-Powell doctrine. Mr. Riedel, in his analysis of the al Qaeda threats in Afghanistan and Pakistan, has stated to the President, that the threat in AfPak is to our vital national security interests. In other

²⁴ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 99.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Michael O’Hanlon and Bruce Riedel, “Plan A-Minus for Afghanistan,” *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no.1 (Winter 2011): 123.

²⁷ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 105.

words, “[o]ne’s national interests are what is critical.”²⁸ Mr. Riedel makes this assessment through the realist theory rubric of “the concept of interest defined in terms of power”²⁹ and the achievement of “[i]nterests gained through power.”³⁰ In layman’s terms, Mr. Riedel is recommending to the President that the threat in AfPak is so great to our vital interests that the President should direct elements of United States power to achieve or protect our vital national interests.

Finally, the recommendations made by Mr. Riedel in his strategy review for the President, were included as the United States’ purpose and goals for success in the new Afghanistan and Pakistan strategy. These would, like earlier statements by General Petraeus, ultimately be presented by the Commander in Chief as “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.”³¹ President Obama announced the new AfPak strategy to the American people via speeches in March and December of 2009, as well as within the May 2010 National Security Strategy.

A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan

The implementation of the current Afghanistan strategy was initiated a few weeks after President Obama’s inauguration. In this 27 March 2009 speech from the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building, the President, following an extensive policy review led by Bruce Riedel, announced a new comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan to the American people and the international community. President Obama’s remarks, extracted from the compiled analysis of both civilian and military advisors, introduced and directed AfPak policy, strategy, and objectives.

²⁸ Melshen, “International Relations Theory”.

²⁹ Morgenthau, 5.

³⁰ Melshen, “International Relations Theory”.

³¹ Obama, “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

In his transformational strategic speech “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan”, President Obama framed the problem for his domestic and international audience,

‘The situation is increasingly perilous. It’s been more than seven years since the Taliban was removed from power, yet war rages on, and insurgents control parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Attacks against our troops, our NATO allies, and the Afghan government have risen steadily. And most painfully, 2008 was the deadliest year of the war for American forces.’³²

The President continued his address by reminding the domestic and international audience of the seriousness of the threat to American interests, and those of our allies, in Afghanistan. Seen within his statements, which follow, are a precept of Hans J Morgenthau’s realist theory and the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine.

‘Al Qaeda and its allies – the terrorists who planned and supported the 9/11 attacks – are in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Multiple intelligence estimates have warned that al Qaeda is actively planning attacks on the United States homeland from its safe haven in Pakistan. And if the Afghan government falls to the Taliban – or allows al Qaeda to go unchallenged – that country will again be a base for terrorists who want to kill as many of our people as they possibly can.’³³

As a realist, he emphasized the Afghanistan threat was not only to the national interests of the United States, but also to the interests of our allies and partner nations, when he additionally stated, “...this is not simply an American problem—far from it. It is, instead an international security challenge of the highest order...[t]he safety of people around the world is at stake.”³⁴

In March of 2009, after eight years of fighting a war in Afghanistan, many Americans and allies were questioning what the United States’ purpose in Afghanistan

³² Obama, “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

was. The President provided America and the international audience with a simple, straightforward, and realist answer. “We are in Afghanistan to confront a common enemy that threatens the United States, our friends, and our allies....”³⁵ Within this declaration, President Obama stated our national purpose and identified the fact that the threat in Afghanistan was to our vital national interests, as well as to that of our allies and friends. By recognizing “[o]ne’s national interests are what is critical,”³⁶ President Obama answered Secretary Weinberger’s test one and Secretary Powell’s question one that the United States should not commit forces to combat unless vital national interests of the United States, or our allies, are threatened. By meeting the Weinberger-Powell tests, President Obama’s declaration leads directly back to Hans J. Morgenthau’s realist theory of international politics, “[t]he main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power.”³⁷

In a sound strategy, it is imperative to clearly identify strategic “Ends”, “Ways”, and “Means” in order to achieve the desired end-state “within acceptable bounds of feasibility, suitability, acceptability, and risk....”³⁸ In this significant speech, President Obama identified for the American audience the strategic goal, the “what”, to be accomplished, or “Ends” when he stated, “[i] want the American people to understand that we have a clear and focused goal: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future.

³⁵ Obama, “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

³⁶ Melshen, “International Relations Theory”.

³⁷ Morgenthau, 5.

³⁸ Harry R. Yarger, “Strategy Paradigm: Theory and Process Restated,” in *Strategy and the National Security Professional: Strategic Thinking and Strategy Formulation in the 21st Century*, Praeger Security International, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers), 4.

That's the goal that must be achieved. That is a cause that could not be more just.”³⁹

Looking at this declaration, one can see that President Obama, as a realist, has answered Secretary Weinberger's test three that states, U.S. combat troops should only be committed with clearly defined political and military objectives, and Secretary Powell's question two that asks, do we have a clear attainable objective? Additionally, the President answers Secretary Weinberger's test two, that U.S. troops should only be committed wholeheartedly and with clear intention of winning, when he stated, “...to the terrorists who oppose us, my message is the same: We will defeat you.”⁴⁰

President Obama also presented his audience with the strategic “Ways”, or the “how”, the strategic objectives would “be accomplished by the employment of the instruments of power.”⁴¹ The President emphasized, “[t]o achieve our goals, we need a stronger, smarter and comprehensive strategy”⁴² that utilizes all the elements of our national power, Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic, Financial, Intelligence, and Law enforcement to attain our objectives in AfPak. He continued, “[t]o focus on the greatest threat to our people, America must no longer deny resources to Afghanistan because of the war in Iraq.”⁴³ By making this statement, the President directed precious national resources to leaders in AfPak, in order to accomplish the strategic end state. Furthermore, President Obama stressed, “[t]o succeed, we and our friends and allies must reverse the Taliban's gains, and promote a more capable and accountable Afghan government...”⁴⁴ so that the United States and the coalition can, “...enhance the military,

³⁹ Obama, “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Yarger, “Strategy Paradigm”, 4.

⁴² Obama, “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

governance and economic capacity of Afghanistan and Pakistan....”⁴⁵ Conducting counter-terrorism actions alone will not ensure success for America in Afghanistan. A counterinsurgency campaign must protect the Afghan people, and eventually the responsibility for that protection must be transitioned to Afghans. In the following statement, the President concluded by explaining how this strategy would accomplish the strategic end state, and the ultimate transition to Afghan lead. “We will shift the emphasis of our mission to training and increasing the size of Afghan security forces, so that they can eventually take the lead in securing their country. That’s how we will prepare Afghans to take responsibility for their security, and how we will ultimately be able to bring our own troops home.”⁴⁶

Finally, in the March 2009 AfPak strategy speech, President Obama addressed the “Means”, or the precious resources, that the United States would utilize to execute the new Afghanistan and Pakistan strategy. Of the key elements of national power (Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic, Financial, Intelligence, and Law enforcement), the President provided the following remarks in regard to the military element. “I’ve already ordered the deployment of 17,000 troops...These Soldiers and Marines will take the fight to the Taliban in the south and east, and give us a greater capacity to partner with Afghan security forces and go after insurgents along the border.”⁴⁷ To close the military element of national power, the President announced that the United States would deploy 4,000 additional personnel to train Afghan security forces. These increases “...will truly resource our effort to train and support the Afghan Army and police. Every American unit in Afghanistan will be partnered with an Afghan

⁴⁵ Obama, “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

unit, and we will seek additional trainers from our NATO allies to ensure that every Afghan unit has a coalition partner.”⁴⁸

Concerning the element of diplomacy, the President stated that United States, Afghanistan, and Pakistan would “launch a standing, trilateral dialogue”⁴⁹ to foster the shared responsibility of the region and to promote and “enhance intelligence sharing and military cooperation along the border, while addressing issues of common concern like trade, energy, and economic development.”⁵⁰ The President, with respect to the key elements of economic and financial, specifically stated, “[a] campaign against extremism will not succeed with bullets or bombs alone...I am calling upon Congress to pass a bipartisan bill...that authorizes \$1.5 billion in direct support...to develop the economy...resources that will build schools and roads and hospitals.”⁵¹

To synergize the assets of all the elements of national power, and in order to provide the appropriate resources necessary for implementing the new AfPak strategy, the President stated that he would order “a substantial increase in our civilians on the ground ...to help the Afghan government serve its people and develop an economy.”⁵² Since strategic resources are precious and ultimately limited, the President concluded his remarks regarding American capital by providing the following statement, “I don’t ask for this support lightly. These are challenging times. Resources are stretched. But the American people must understand that this is a down payment on our own future....”⁵³

This statement by President Obama reinforces his realist Afghanistan strategy to

⁴⁸ Obama, “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

Americans. Committing finite American strategic resources now to support the AfPak strategy will protect our vital national interests.

A metric that the President's new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan was rooted in realistic theory was demonstrated the following morning when The Washington Post published an editorial titled "The Price of Realism." Within the editorial, the Washington Post stated that the President's "...[strategy] for Afghanistan and Pakistan...is conservative as well as bold...and politically brave" because the President, "at a time of economic crisis and war-weariness at home...is ordering not just a major increase in U.S. troops, but also an ambitious effort...in both Afghanistan and Pakistan."⁵⁴ The reason this is important to note, is that this comment in the editorial is a direct link to Hans J. Morgenthau's realist theory that national interests are supreme. Specifically, the threat in Afghanistan to our national interests is as much of a vital threat to the country as the economic crisis. "Such initiatives are not the product of starry-eyed idealism...but of a realistic appreciation of what has worked – and failed – during the past seven years."⁵⁵

Commander ISAF Assessment

In June of 2009, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates directed Commander, United States Central Command and Commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force to provide an assessment of the situation in Afghanistan to answer the following questions:

- Can ISAF achieve the mission?
- If so, how should ISAF go about achieving the mission?

⁵⁴ "The Price of Realism".

⁵⁵ Ibid.

- What is required to achieve the mission?⁵⁶

General Stanley McChrystal, Commander, United States and NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) released his commander's initial assessment on 30 August 2009. Within this unclassified document, the general stated that the situation in Afghanistan was serious; "neither success nor failure can be taken for granted."⁵⁷ The risks in Afghanistan were high but that "NATO's Comprehensive Strategic Political Military Plan and President Obama's strategy to disrupt, dismantle, and eventually defeat al Qaeda and prevent their return to Afghanistan have laid out a clear path of what we must do."⁵⁸ He warned that stability in Afghanistan was paramount so that the Afghan government did not fall back into Taliban control with Afghanistan once again becoming a base for global terrorism. In his initial assessment, General McChrystal spelled out the problem on the ground when he stated,

...many indicators suggest the overall situation is deteriorating. We face not only a resilient and growing insurgency; there is also a crisis of confidence among Afghans – in both their government and the international community – that undermines our credibility and emboldens the insurgents. Furthermore, a perception that our resolve is uncertain makes Afghans reluctant to align with us against the insurgents.⁵⁹

He further determined that success in Afghanistan was achievable, but not by "doubling down on the previous strategy."⁶⁰ His key take away was that there was an urgent need for a significant change to the Afghanistan Theater strategy. Instead of an under-resourced, counter-terrorism only strategy, ISAF would need a new strategy. "This new strategy must also be properly resourced and executed through an integrated civilian-

⁵⁶ Headquarters International Security Assistance Force, *Commander's Initial Assessment*, (Kabul, Afghanistan, August 2009), i.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 1-1.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

military counterinsurgency campaign that earns the support of the Afghan people and provides them with a secure environment.”⁶¹ This statement by General McChrystal instituted the strategic shift, directed by President Obama, within the Afghanistan Theater from a primarily counter-terrorism strategy to a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy. “Our strategy cannot be focused on seizing terrain or destroying insurgent forces; our objective must be the population. In the struggle to gain the support of the people, every action we take must enable this effort.”⁶² General McChrystal believed that the problems of the under-resourced Afghanistan campaign could be corrected by a “new approach – one that is properly resourced and supported by better unity of effort.”⁶³ Within this statement, General McChrystal levied a requirement for additional resources, not only military resources, but also additional civilians, Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) assets, and other low density high demand enablers, in order to accomplish the strategic objectives. One can see the beginnings of Applying Realism Theory in Afghanistan⁶⁴ as General McChrystal transformed the Afghanistan Theater strategy, based on his assessment, to align with the AfPak national policy and strategy directed by the President in March of 2009. Specifically, one can see Realism Theory applied as General McChrystal requested additional national capabilities, and prepared to implement those resources, “Power”, to execute the new AfPak strategy developed by President Obama and his advisers, in order to achieve “National Interests.”

⁶¹ Headquarters (ISAF), 1-1.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, 2-1.

⁶⁴ Michael Samples, *Applying Realism Theory in Afghanistan* (Norfolk: Joint Forces Staff College, 2011), Cover Page.

Upon receiving Commander ISAF's Afghanistan assessment, President Obama and his National Security Council, convened numerous times throughout the fall of 2009 to analysis, discuss, and determine the United States' objectives and strategy for Afghanistan and to ensure that the Afghanistan strategy would be neatly nested within the national policy and strategic objectives for the overarching AfPak Strategy. These classified NSC discussions, would reaffirm our purpose, refine our objectives, and ultimately determine how to properly resource the requirements of General McChrystal's theater strategy, in order to meet its objectives in Afghanistan and thus meet the national strategic objectives for the overarching AfPak Strategy.

Afghanistan Theater Strategy Review – Fall 2009

In a National Security Council meeting on 23 November 2009, the President stated, “[o]ur goal is to stabilize population centers and then transition to Afghan forces.”⁶⁵ In this statement, the President acknowledges Realism Theory and the Powell Doctrine, rules two and five, by providing the NSC with the United States’ “clear attainable objective”⁶⁶ and with the United States’ “plausible exit strategy”⁶⁷ from Afghanistan. In this same classified meeting, the Secretary of Defense submitted a coordinated interagency memo to the President that refined the American military objectives in Afghanistan.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates’ six primary military objectives in Afghanistan:

1. Reversing Taliban momentum.
2. Denying the Taliban access to and control of key population and production centers and lines of communication.

⁶⁵ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 291.

⁶⁶ Colin L. Powell, “U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead”, 38.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

3. Disrupting the Taliban outside secured areas and preventing al Qaeda from regaining sanctuary in Afghanistan.
4. Degrading the Taliban to levels manageable by the Afghans.
5. Increasing the size and capacity of the Afghan security forces.
6. Building the Afghan government, especially key ministries.⁶⁸

These refined military objectives in Afghanistan were developed in response to General McChrystal's assessment and were primarily focused on the United States' strategic end state for the Afghanistan Theater and for the Taliban. Additionally, these military objectives were less ambitious than the overarching "disrupting, dismantling and defeating of al Qaeda" contained within the President's March 2009 AfPak strategy. The overarching AfPak strategy focused American efforts and resources solely on al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan as the principal threat to U.S. vital national interests. Secretary Gates' refined U.S. military objectives for the Afghanistan Theater focused American military efforts directly on "disrupting" and "degrading" the Taliban through counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism operations. Additionally, the refined military objectives focused on the training of the Afghan security forces to increase their size and capacity in order to initiate a condition-based mission transition from U.S. to Afghan lead and to begin retrograde of U.S. forces by July 2011.

During the 23 November 2009 NSC meeting, Secretary of State Clinton wholeheartedly endorsed Secretary Gates' refined military objectives and the additional forces requested by General McChrystal when she stated, "[i]f we don't come with an approach close to this we shouldn't even try, because we'll just be wasting time, lives and money...Gates' six objectives and McChrystal's request for 40,000 troops means we will

⁶⁸ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 290.

have a fighting chance to be successful.”⁶⁹ Additionally, Secretary Clinton echoed elements of the Weinberger Doctrine, rule number two, that proposes “U.S. troops should only be committed wholeheartedly with the clear intention of winning,”⁷⁰ when she stated, “I endorse this effort...[i]t comes with enormous cost but if we go half hearted we’ll achieve nothing. We must act like we are going to win.”⁷¹ Secretary of Defense Gates, having already submitted his six refined military objectives, stated that he agreed with Secretary Clinton and that the outcome in Afghanistan was critical to the United States’ vital national interests. Additionally, he endorsed General McChrystal’s request to increase U.S. forces to support the Afghanistan Theater strategy and summarized by stating, “[a]pprove three brigades, formal report in July 2010 on progress, major reassessment in December 2010, and that July 2011 is when they could begin to make transitions and thin forces.”⁷² The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mullen, strongly endorsed the plan, the refined military objectives, the additional force request, General McChrystal’s counterinsurgency strategy, and the transition timeline presented by Secretary Gates. General Petraeus stated to the President, “[y]ou’ve got one bite at this apple...it ought to be a decisive one. I agree with the secretary and chairman...”⁷³ He summarized his comments by stating, “[t]he objectives are good, as defined...the July 2011 goal is fine on the thinning of our forces...but for conditions-based transitions because that gives the President more flexibility.”⁷⁴ In regard to the development of the Afghanistan National Security Forces, General Petraeus agreed with

⁶⁹ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 292.

⁷⁰ Weinberger, *Fighting For Peace*, 441.

⁷¹ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 292.

⁷² *Ibid*, 293.

⁷³ *Ibid*.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 294.

General McChrystal that ANSF development would take time. “2013 at the earliest and it is high-risk, but we need additional U.S. and ISAF forces to create space and time for ANSF development. It can be done with the right number of forces and resources. Have to convince the ANSF and people that it can be done, and to convince the Taliban they’ll lose.”⁷⁵ General McChrystal concluded the National Security Council’s comments back to the President by stating that if he did not receive the 40,000 troop increase, that he was committed regardless and would have to execute a “Plan B”. General McChrystal’s “Plan B” would focus on pulling back ISAF forces from forward positions to secure key population centers, utilize allocated ISAF forces to train Afghan security forces, and continue to target and remove key Taliban and al Qaeda sanctuaries in Afghanistan and Pakistan. General McChrystal’s “Plan B” was basically the hybrid option developed by the Vice Chairman, General Cartwright, and championed by Vice President Biden at numerous NSC meetings throughout the fall of 2009. In essence, “Plan B” was a smaller U.S. footprint within Afghanistan utilizing concentrated counterterrorism operations. The President closed the NSC meeting by summarizing all the advice he had received from the National Security Council and stated he would soon make a decision on the Afghanistan Theater strategy.

A few days after the NSC meeting, the President held a small meeting with key members of his White House national security team to provide them with some additional executive guidance. During that meeting, the President stated that he was leaning toward approving 30,000 additional troops for the Afghanistan theater strategy. Additionally, as he had previously stated a few days prior to the National Security Council, President Obama again acknowledged Realism Theory and the Powell Doctrine, rules two and five,

⁷⁵ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 294.

by providing his White House national security team with the United States' "clear attainable objective"⁷⁶ and with the United States' "plausible exit strategy"⁷⁷ from Afghanistan. The President provided these realist elements to his White House team when he stated that the announcement of the Afghanistan Theater strategy to the American people would have to be, "a plan about how we're going to hand it off and get out of Afghanistan...[e]verything that we're doing has to be focused on how we're going to get to the point where we can reduce our footprint. It's in our national security interest...[i]t has to be clear that this is what we're doing."⁷⁸ The President's guidance to the White House national security team is classic Morgenthau and Weinberger-Powell realism. His guidance is focused solely on the United States' national interests and the attaining of one's interests through the implementation of national power, particularly when the President stated, "we need to make clear that we're going to have interests in Afghanistan that are enduring, in terms of counterterrorism and governance assistance."⁷⁹ The President's realist guidance to his White House national security team regarding the Afghanistan Theater strategy continued when he stated, "[w]e're not talking about setting a date for removing our troops and lessening our commitment. We're talking about identifying the time frame for transition."⁸⁰ In this statement, the President again acknowledged the Powell Doctrine, when he provided the White House national security team and his speechwriters with the "exit strategy," the point of initial transition from U.S. to Afghan lead by July 2011, that the United States would identify to the American people, the Afghans, our allies, and the international community. Furthermore, the

⁷⁶ Colin L. Powell, "U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead", 38.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 301.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 302.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

President stressed that he wanted to keep away from utilizing the military's counterinsurgency language in public. The language that the President wanted to use was "target, train, and transfer."⁸¹ The President added, "We need to set public expectations that this is going to be difficult and it's going to take time...[w]e need to make clear to the people that the cancer is in Pakistan...[t]he reason we're doing the target, train, and transfer in Afghanistan is so the cancer doesn't spread there."⁸² This is important because the President, as a realist, completely comprehends that regional stability of nuclear Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the rest of region, is in the United States' vital national interests. The President concluded his guidance to his team by stating the reason why he was going to approve the Afghanistan Theater strategy and a majority of the resources requested by General McChrystal. As a realist, the President believed that the end state for Afghanistan was inextricably linked and nested within the Nation's overarching AfPak policy and strategy and that the primary theater objectives in Afghanistan, defined by Secretary Gates during the 23 November NSC meeting, were in the United States' national interests.

Prior to the 2009 Thanksgiving holiday and following the small meeting with the White House national security team, the President met with Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in the Oval Office. The purpose of the meeting was to provide the Secretary with the final decisions regarding the Afghanistan strategy review and to tell the Secretary that under the redefined mission objectives, the President had decided to approve 30,000 troops for Afghanistan and no more. The President stated that "he wasn't going to support an open-ended commitment...he was not going to do nation building or pursue a

⁸¹ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 302.

⁸² Ibid.

full counterinsurgency strategy.”⁸³ These statements by President Obama are directly linked to the Powell Doctrine, rules two and five, regarding the United States’ Afghanistan strategy. The President would be insistent that the United States’ Afghanistan strategy would maintain “a clear attainable objective”⁸⁴ that would not be open-ended with potential for mission creep and that the United States would maintain “a plausible exit strategy to avoid endless entanglements”⁸⁵ in Afghanistan. The President stated that his decision on the 30,000 troops not only took into account the Nation’s economic challenges, but also that the 30,000 troop increase was “...what I’m willing to take on, politically.”⁸⁶ The President’s statement to the Secretary of Defense is directly linked to Morgenthau’s first and sixth principles of Realism Theory that “[p]olitics is governed by human nature”⁸⁷ and that realists “act in their own self interests in a rational unitary manner” both individually and towards the Nation because the main question to be asked by a realist in all situations is, “[h]ow does this policy affect the power of the nation?”⁸⁸ President Obama, as a political realist, considered the existence of multiple spheres outside of politics such as, economics, law, and morals, when he considered the actions that the Nation would take towards Afghanistan in order to attain national interests. Additionally, the President’s comment is linked to Harry R. Yarger’s strategic theory that “[p]olitical purpose dominates all strategy.”⁸⁹ Specifically the President, politically speaking, was not willing to exceed any number greater than a 30,000 troop increase in Afghanistan based on the Nation’s domestic and external strategic

⁸³ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 308.

⁸⁴ Colin L. Powell, “U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead”, 38.

⁸⁵ Powell, “U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead”, 38.

⁸⁶ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 308.

⁸⁷ Melshen, “International Relations Theory”.

⁸⁸ Morgenthau, 12.

⁸⁹ Yarger, *Strategic Theory for the 21st Century*, 6.

environment. Because, as the President stated in Bob Woodward's book, Obama's War, "[t]he country would not support business as usual in Afghanistan...I'm at 30,000...The President had decided."⁹⁰ The President would provide the secretary with additional latitude of ten percent increase, to be utilized for exceptional circumstances, but wanted to know if the Secretary of Defense could support the President's decision on 30,000. Secretary Gates stated he would support the President's decision of a 30,000 force increase to support the Afghanistan strategy.

The President provided the National Security Council and the military senior leadership with his final orders on Afghanistan and the Afghanistan strategy via a six page, single-space, directive that all parties would read and sign. Within this document the President directed the two goals for Afghanistan; defeat al Qaeda, which linked back to the Nation's overarching AfPak strategy, and degrade the Taliban, which the President stipulated, as the primary objective from Secretary Gates' memo regarding the six military objectives for Afghanistan. Additionally, the President adopted and incorporated within his directive all six of the Secretary of Defense's military objectives as the operational concept within the Afghanistan strategy, including "reversing the Taliban momentum and then denying, disrupting, and degrading them."⁹¹ Also, the President directed that the CIA would intensify their drone and other attacks on al Qaeda in Pakistan and that General McChrystal would increase the tempo of counterterrorism operations against the Taliban within Afghanistan to decimate the Taliban insurgency. Furthermore, the President ordered that the overall military mission "will be limited in

⁹⁰ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 308.

⁹¹ Ibid, 313.

scope and scale to only what is necessary to attain the U.S. goal”⁹² by restricting the troop number to 30,000 and establishing July 2011 as the date “we will expect to begin transferring lead security responsibility from these forces to the ANSF...[i]n July 2011, we will assess progress nationwide and the President will consider the timing of changing the military mission.”⁹³ Within this directive, the President dictated the Nation’s realism goals and strategy for Afghanistan and ensured that the Afghanistan mission would be restricted so as not to expand but to only narrow. The bottom-line on why the President decided to approve the increase of resources and military forces for Afghanistan was that they would be able to deliver an overwhelming heavy strike against the Taliban to stop their momentum, develop the capacity of the Afghan government and security forces to initiate transition to Afghan lead, and give the fragile and vulnerable Karzai government an opportunity to establish a form of central governance for the country. Additionally, the increase would restrict the enemy’s freedom of movement and create capacity within the AfPak region for additional resources to increase counterterrorism operations against al Qaeda and the Taliban. Finally, the action would demonstrate the United States’ overall commitment and resolve, specifically to al Qaeda, the Taliban, the leaders and populace of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the region, and the international community.

The President’s final declaration on how the United States would reaffirm our purpose, refine our objectives, and ultimately resource the requirements of the Afghanistan theater strategy, in conjunction with the strategic objectives of the AfPak strategy, would be announced to the American people on 1 December 2009 from the United States Military Academy. According to Bob Woodward in his book Obama’s

⁹² Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 314.

⁹³ Ibid, 315.

War, the President provided the following guidance to his speechwriter for inclusion within the West Point speech. The President would remind Americans and the international community of why the United States first went into Afghanistan. He would refresh the audience of the current situation in Afghanistan, based on General McChrystal's assessment, and make the point that Afghanistan and Pakistan are "the epicenter of violent extremism."⁹⁴ Additionally, the President as a realist, linked to Morgenthau's Realism Theory of national interests, would state again that the objectives in Afghanistan would be "resolute with a clear focus on our interests"⁹⁵ and that the fight against "[e]xtremism will be a long struggle."⁹⁶ He would stress that the Afghanistan war was supported by an international coalition of 41 nations and he would describe in detail why he believed in the mission in Afghanistan and why the mission needed additional resources. Connecting to Morgenthau's Realism Theory, that all power is limited, the President, concerning military power as the primary arm of national policy for the last decade, stated to his speechwriter that, "[o]ur entire national policy can't just be focused on terrorism...we also had to be focused on our own economy because it's the foundation of our strength in the world. We can't lose sight of that, and we have too much in recent years."⁹⁷ Finally the President added, "[t]he American people are idealists, but they want their leaders to be realistic."⁹⁸ The speech at West Point would convey that very point.

⁹⁴ *National Security Strategy*, 20.

⁹⁵ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 306.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 307.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*.

West Point Speech – December 2009

On the evening of 1 December 2009, President Obama delivered “the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan”⁹⁹ to the Cadets of West Point, the American people, and the international community. The President opened his remarks with the following statement, “I want to speak to you tonight about our effort in Afghanistan -- the nature of our commitment there, the scope of our interests, and the strategy that my administration will pursue....”¹⁰⁰ With this statement, the President directly linked the Afghanistan strategy and the American effort there to vital U.S. national interests, the principles of Realism Theory, and the Weinberger-Powell doctrine. As a realist, the President believed that “[o]ne’s national interests are what is critical”¹⁰¹ and realized, as Secretaries Weinberger and Powell had stated in their doctrines, that U.S. forces should not be committed unless a vital national interest is threatened, and that it is essential to secure support by the American people and Congress before committing U.S. forces to battle. He further reinforced the principles of Realism Theory and one’s national interests when he stated, “I am convinced that our security is at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan...[i]f I did not think that the security of the United States and the safety of the American people were at stake in Afghanistan, I would gladly order every single one of our troops home....”¹⁰²

Within this significant speech, the President reaffirmed the United States’ purpose, refined our objectives, and resourced the Afghanistan Theater strategy in order

⁹⁹ President Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” *The White House, Office of the Press Secretary*, December 01, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>, (accessed 6 April, 2011)

¹⁰⁰ Obama, “Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

¹⁰¹ Melshen, “International Relations Theory”.

¹⁰² Obama, “Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

to attain the goals of the overarching AfPak strategy. The President reaffirmed the United States' purpose by reminding the audience why the threat in Afghanistan was in the nation's vital interests and "why America and our allies were compelled to fight a war in Afghanistan in the first place."¹⁰³ The al Qaeda attacks of September 11, 2001 that struck at our military and economic centers were planned and launched from bases in Afghanistan, where al Qaeda was harbored by the Taliban. He then evoked how the United Nations Security Council "endorsed the use of all necessary steps to respond to the 9/11 attacks,"¹⁰⁴ how the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, for the first time in its history, invoked Article 5,¹⁰⁵ how Congress authorized the use of force against al Qaeda and the Taliban, and how the U.S. Congressional authorization still continues to this day. He reminded the audience that "Under the banner of this domestic unity and international legitimacy...America, our allies and the world...acting as one to destroy al Qaeda's terrorist network and protect our common security...sent our troops to Afghanistan."¹⁰⁶ He stated how the situation in Afghanistan had deteriorated. How "the Taliban has maintained common cause with al Qaeda."¹⁰⁷ How the Taliban and al Qaeda both had fled over the Pakistan border and established a safe-haven there. How both the Taliban and al Qaeda seek to overthrow the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan. How the Taliban had gained momentum over the years and steadily regained control of swaths of territory in Afghanistan. How the Taliban and al Qaeda increasingly engaged in brazen and violent attacks from their safe havens along the border of Pakistan. How the Afghan government had been hampered by corruption, drug trade, an under developed economy,

¹⁰³ Obama, "Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan".

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ NATO Article 5 is a commitment that states that an attack on one member nation is an attack on all.

¹⁰⁶ Obama, "Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan".

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

and insufficient security forces. “And how our forces lack the full support they need to effectively train and partner with Afghan security forces and better secure the population.”¹⁰⁸

The President went on to remind the audience that in March of 2009, because of the aforementioned deteriorating circumstances, he had approved for the Afghanistan Theater, a long standing request for additional forces. In conjunction with the force increase, he had simultaneously announced an overarching AfPak Strategy that recognized “the fundamental connection between our war effort in Afghanistan and the extremist safe havens in Pakistan”¹⁰⁹ and stated “[o]ur overarching goal: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future.”¹¹⁰ To meet our overarching strategic goal, the President pronounced, “we will pursue the following objectives within Afghanistan. We must deny al Qaeda a safe haven. We must reverse the Taliban’s momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government. And we must strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan’s security forces and government so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan’s future.”¹¹¹ The refined objectives for the Afghanistan Theater strategy, developed during the ten week Afghanistan strategy review, acknowledge the Weinberger-Powell doctrine regarding “clear attainable objectives.”¹¹² Specifically, the refined Afghanistan Theater objectives fulfill Secretary Weinberger’s test three that states, “U.S. combat troops should be committed only with clearly defined political and

¹⁰⁸ Obama, “Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Powell, “U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead,” 38.

military objectives.”¹¹³ To attain our objectives, the President stated that, “as Commander-in-Chief, I have determined that it is in our vital national interest to send an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan. These are the resources that we need to seize the initiative, while building the Afghan capacity that can allow for a responsible transition of our forces out of Afghanistan.”¹¹⁴

As the President had clearly communicated our purpose, ends, ways, and means, with the announcement of the overarching AfPak strategy in March of 2009, he had again presented and outlined the essential elements of a clear realistic strategy at West Point. He finalized his address by providing the audience with how the precious resources he had approved would be utilized to attain our refined Afghanistan theater objectives when he stated, “[t]he 30,000 additional troops...will target the insurgency and secure key population centers...increase our ability to train competent Afghan security forces, and to partner with them so that more Afghans can get into the fight. And they will help create the conditions for the United States to transfer responsibility to the Afghans.”¹¹⁵

President Obama’s West Point speech is the capstone event for the United States’ policy, strategy, and objectives for Afghanistan. The speech nests the Afghanistan Theater strategy within the United States overarching AfPak strategy and links America’s policy, strategy, and objectives for Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Realist Weinberger-Powell doctrines and to the principles of Realism Theory.

¹¹³ Weinberger, *Fighting For Peace*, 441.

¹¹⁴ Obama, “Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3: THE WAY AHEAD

Strategic Success – Partnering, Transition, and Protection of Vital U.S. Interests

“I couldn’t think of another way to grab Karzai by the lapels and say: ‘You have to take ownership of this. This is your war. Your young men have to sign up. We will be here, we will be your partner forever, but we are not going to keep tens of thousands of American and other foreign troops here forever.”¹

“One’s national interests are what is critical”²

President Obama has directed July 2011 as the point when military operations will start to transition from U.S. lead to Afghan security force lead. President Hamid Karzai has identified 2014 as the year that Afghans will assume full responsibility for security in Afghanistan. “The November 2010 NATO conference in Lisbon signaled that the United States and its NATO allies increasingly look to 2014 as the year of full transition of NATO efforts to Afghan leadership.”³

The centerpiece of General Petraeus’ International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) theater strategy is the training of the Afghan Army and police (security) forces. This intense effort to train the Afghan security forces will enable the coalition to transition between July 2011 and 2014, from a “large-scale and resource-intensive counterinsurgency campaign”⁴ to a leaner and more sustainable U.S. and allied presence, which will focus solely on the most dangerous, long term threats from al Qaeda, and with protecting U.S. vital national interests in the region.

The United States’ realist based strategy in Afghanistan is attaining the strategic objectives directed by President Obama in March and December of 2009. The

¹ Hayes, “Robert Gates On Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq, And The Defense Budget”.

² Melshen, “International Relations Theory”.

³ LTG David W. Barno, USA (Ret.) and Andrew Exum, *Responsible Transition: Securing U.S. Interests in Afghanistan Beyond 2011* (Washington D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2010), 5.

⁴ Ibid.

overarching U.S. AfPak strategy to “disrupt, dismantle, and defeat” al Qaeda and the Afghanistan Theater strategy to “degrade” the Taliban, preventing their return in the future, is producing positive results. This is especially true in Southern Afghanistan, because of the additional forces that arrived over the last twelve to eighteen months.

After returning from Afghanistan in December of 2010, Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates provided his assessment of American efforts there. ‘I saw first-hand our efforts across the country and met with troops and commanders on the ground. I saw personally how international and Afghan forces have halted Taliban momentum throughout the country and are reversing it in their traditional strongholds of Helmand and Kandahar. The sense of progress among those closest to the fight is palpable.’⁵ He continued by stating that the positive results in Afghanistan were the result of a lot of tough fighting, and that because of those efforts, “the Taliban control far less territory than they did a year ago. The bottom line is that the military progress made in just the past three to four months – since the last of the additional 30,000 U.S. troop arrived – has exceeded my expectations.”⁶

In addition to the positive efforts made to “disrupt, dismantle, and defeat”, the United States has made great strides to achieve the strategic objective to “shift the emphasis of our mission to training and increasing the size of the Afghan security forces, so that they can eventually take the lead in securing their country.”⁷ Secretary Robert Gates made the following comment regarding the military successes and the capacity and capability of the Afghan security forces in his December 2010 assessment. “Central to

⁵ Secretary of Defense, Robert M. Gates, Speech, “Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategy Review,” U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), December 16, 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1526> . (accessed 8 November 2010)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Obama, “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

these efforts has been the growth of the Afghan security forces – in both size and capability – and they are ahead of schedule. More than 65,000 new recruits have joined the fight this year....”⁸ Secretary Gates continued his assessment of the Afghan security forces by stating, “[t]hey are performing well in partnership with coalition troops and will continue to improve with the right training, equipment, and support. Afghan troops are already responsible for security in Kabul and are increasingly taking the lead in Kandahar.”⁹ Finally, Secretary Gates stated in his December assessment of the United States’ ultimate goal for transitioning security to the Afghan government, “[t]he process has already begun in places like Kabul and will accelerate in the spring and summer of 2011. The transition will spread nationwide over time, it will be gradual, and it will be based on conditions on the ground.”¹⁰

However, as a true realist, Secretary Gates presented a word of prudence in his Afghanistan assessment, while stating that strategic objectives will be attained. “While this progress, as the President and Secretary Clinton said, is fragile and reversible, I believe that we will be able to achieve the key goals laid out by the President last year, and further embraced by other NATO heads of state in Lisbon – that is, for Afghan forces to begin taking the security lead in the coming year and for the Afghan government to assume security responsibility by the end of 2014.”¹¹

In testimony to the Senate Armed Service Committee (SASC) on 15 March, 2011, the opening remarks of General David Petraeus, encapsulated the United States’ path to strategic success, shaded with prudence, when he stated, “it is ISAF’s assessment that the

⁸ Gates, “Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategy Review,”.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

momentum achieved by the Taliban in Afghanistan since 2005 has been arrested in much of the country and reversed in a number of important areas. However, while the security progress achieved over the past year is significant, it is also fragile and reversible.”¹² As he continued, General Petraeus expounded upon our pathway to strategic success,

‘it is clear that much difficult work lies ahead with our Afghan partners to solidify and expand our gains in the face of the expected Taliban spring offensive. Nonetheless, the hard-fought achievements in 2010 and early 2011 have enabled the Joint Afghan-NATO Transition Board to recommend initiation this spring of transition to Afghan lead in several provinces. The achievements of the past year are also very important as I prepare to provide options and a recommendation to President Obama for commencement of the drawdown of the US surge forces in July.’¹³

General Petraeus concluded his opening comments by stating, “[o]f note,...the progress achieved has put us on the right azimuth to accomplish the objective agreed upon at last November's Lisbon Summit, that of Afghan forces in the lead throughout the country by the end of 2014.”¹⁴ During his testimony, General Petraeus reinforced elements of topics also touched upon by Secretary Gates’ during his December 2010 Afghanistan assessment, by stating,

‘the past eight months have seen important, but hard-fought, progress in Afghanistan. Key insurgent safe havens have been taken away from the Taliban, numerous insurgent leaders have been killed or captured...Meanwhile, Afghan forces have grown in number and capability, local security solutions have been instituted, and security improvements in key areas like Kabul, Kandahar, and Helmand Provinces have, in turn, enabled progress in the areas of governance and development...The trajectory, however, has generally been upward since last summer...we believe that we will be able to build on the momentum achieved in 2010...’¹⁵

¹² Bill Roggio, “Full text of General Petraeus’ testimony to Congress,” *Long War Journal 4 Threat Matrix*, March 16, 2011. http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2011/03/full_text_of_general_petraeus.php. (accessed 16 April 2011)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Strategic success for the United States in Afghanistan hinges upon three key elements. First and foremost, a U.S., NATO, and Afghan partnering concept that is designed to train and build the initial capacities of “Afghan institutions including army, police, and other parts of the government,”¹⁶ not necessarily comparable to western standards, but better educated, equipped, and trained than the Taliban and al Qaeda forces that they are fighting. Simultaneously, the U.S. and NATO must execute a conditions based, gradual drawdown, and responsible transition for lead, to Afghan government and security forces. Third, holding true to the principles of Realism, the United States must maintain strategic access within the AfPak region, in order to strike against vital threats and to protect and attain our vital national interests. As General Petraeus realistically stated at the conclusion of his testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, “...our objectives in Afghanistan and in the region are of vital importance, and we must do all that we can to achieve those objectives. Those of us on the ground believe that the strategy on which we are embarked provides the best approach for doing just that....”¹⁷

Recommendations for further study

The author believes that the six recommendations made by Lieutenant General David W. Barno, USA, (Ret.), former Commander, Combined Force Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A), and Andrew Exum, in their report, “Responsible Transition: Securing U.S. Interests in Afghanistan Beyond 2011”¹⁸ are realistic in nature and can ensure the United States’ strategic success if properly resourced, employed, and executed.

¹⁶ O’Hanlon and Riedel, 123.

¹⁷ Roggio.

¹⁸ Barno, 3.

The reader may also refer to the article “Plan A-Minus for Afghanistan”¹⁹ by Michael O’Hanlon and Bruce Riedel in the Winter 2011, Washington Quarterly. Bruce Riedel, who was handpicked by President Obama, worked extensively on the March 2009 strategy review. His recommendations to the President were included as the United States’ purpose and goals for success in the Afghanistan and Pakistan (AfPak) strategy.

Finally, the author recommends that the reader review Hans J. Morgenthau’s “The Promise of Diplomacy: Its Nine Rules”²⁰ in the final chapter of his book Politics Among Nations, The Struggle for Power and Peace.

After Thoughts

“Realism, considers prudence – the weighing of the consequences of alternative political actions – to be the supreme virtue in politics.”²¹ Each of the following quotes urges prudence in its own way:

- 1) “I believe if we had, and would, keep our dirty, bloody, dollar-crooked fingers out of the business of these nations so full of depressed, exploited people, they will arrive at a solution of their own. That they design and want. That they fight and work for...and not the American style, which they don’t want. Not one crammed down their throats by the Americans. – General David Shoup, Commandant, United States Marine Corps, ret.”²²
- 2) “...the many real and would-be kingmakers erred not through malice or ignorance, but through excess of ambition. These proconsuls and paladins undertook – to state it simply – to do the impossible for the ungrateful.”²³

¹⁹ O’Hanlon and Riedel.

²⁰ Morgenthau, 584.

²¹ Ibid, 12.

²² Paul Melshen, “Macroeconomic Theory and International Relations Theory,” briefing slides with scripted commentary, Joint Advanced Warfighting School, Joint Forces Staff College, National Defense University, VA, October, 2010.

²³ Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company. Inc., 2008), 423.

Ultimately when urging prudence, one must come to this quote from Clausewitz. Although he came years before Hans J. Morgenthau and Secretaries Weinberger and Powell, one can detect realism when he cautioned leaders,

3) “The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.”²⁴

U.S. policymakers and strategy planners need to heed these realistic prudent statements prior to utilizing U.S. power. Idealistic and moralistic adventures may not be well advised, and may even endanger the nation’s vital national interests. Ultimately, realists understand that, “[a]ll nations act in their own self interests,”²⁵ “[o]ne’s national interests are what is critical,”²⁶ and nations attain interests through power. As Thucydides once stated, “the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.”²⁷

²⁴ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Alford A. Knopf, 1993), 100.

²⁵ Paul Melshen, “International Relations Theory, Policy Making, and the Decision to Use Force,” briefing slides with scripted commentary, Joint Advanced Warfighting School, Joint Forces Staff College, National Defense University, VA, 10 September, 2010.

²⁶ Melshen, “International Relations Theory”.

²⁷ Thucydides, 402.

CONCLUSION

“To be blunt, to fail-or to be seen to fail-in...Afghanistan would be a disastrous blow to U.S. credibility, both among friends and allies and among potential adversaries.”¹

Based on the Realism Theories of Hans J. Morgenthau and the American corollary doctrines of Secretaries Weinberger and Powell, known as the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine, this paper demonstrated that the United States’ policy, strategy, and objectives in Afghanistan, “to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda,” “to degrade the Taliban,” “to prevent their return,” and to transition to Afghan lead by 2011, are in the nation’s vital national interests. The realism framework of the Afghanistan strategy is nested within the United States’ overarching; realism based, AfPak strategy, and is ultimately required in order to defeat al Qaeda, and to support the American effort in Pakistan. Afghanistan is a means to accomplishing the United States’ primary strategic objectives, to kill al Qaeda, destroy al Qaeda safe havens in Pakistan, and secure Pakistan’s nuclear weapons.

The United States’ policy, strategy, and objectives in Afghanistan, that were laid out by President Barack Obama in March of 2009 and reaffirmed at West Point in December of 2009, are achievable by the transition timeframe of 2011-2014, meet the realist rules of the Weinberger-Powell doctrine, and are based on Hans J. Morgenthau’s Principles of Realism Theory. That being the case, the author believes that the United States will attain our national objectives, nested within our national strategy, and succeed in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

¹ Gates, “A Balanced Strategy” 28.

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VITA

Lieutenant Colonel Michael E. Samples Jr., United States Marine Corps

Currently a student earning a Master Degree at the Joint Advanced Warfighting School (JAWS), Joint Forces Staff College, National Defense University. Prior to his assignment to the Joint Advanced Warfighting School, LtCol Samples served as the Section Head, Global Force Management (GFM), Current Operations Branch (POC), Plans Policy and Operations (PP&O), Headquarters Marine Corps, Pentagon. In this capacity, LtCol Samples coordinated all United States Marine Corps active and reserve component force allocation with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the Joint Staff (JS), Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC), other Services Headquarters, Combatant Commander Headquarters, and the regional Marine Component Commands.

Commissioned in 1991 via Naval ROTC and following initial training at The Basic School and Infantry Officer Course in Quantico, Virginia, he was assigned to 1st Battalion 7th Marines where he commanded at the company grade level in combat (Mogadishu, Somalia). As a field grade officer, he has served extensively as a planner on high level staffs; Second Marine Division, CJTF-HOA, Marine Forces Pacific, and Headquarters Marine Corps. LtCol Samples is a graduate of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, the Marine Corps Amphibious Warfare School, and has a degree in History from the University of South Carolina.