

Long Term Goals for Afghanistan and Their Near Term Implications

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The Afghanistan debate often focuses, understandably, on near-term concerns. Sound policies in the near term, however, require a longer term vision to guide them. And for now, several key components of a long term vision for Afghanistan are absent or underdeveloped. What would success look like? What does the United States require to secure our central interests there? What relationship do we want with Afghanistan or its region after 2014, and what role will that require us to play then – or now?

I argue below that core American interests in Afghanistan are real but narrow, and center on the security requirements of denying Afghan territory to terrorists as a base for attacking us or destabilizing Afghanistan’s neighbors. These limited interests can be realized via a range of possible Afghan end states – we need not hold out for the highly ambitious political and economic development aims that the United States adopted in 2001. While desirable, these are not strictly necessary to meet our core requirements. But we cannot settle for just anything. There are limits on the acceptable that exclude outcomes such as partition or anarchy, and this limits the viability of approaches such as a counter-terrorism (CT) strategy that would leave us unable to prevent a collapse of the current government. And it is hard to see any feasible, acceptable, Afghan political outcome that could function without sustained American and other international engagement. In the longer term, that engagement need not be primarily military (though some U.S. military presence ought not to be excluded as a possible means to the end of Afghan stability). But

financial and technical assistance is likely to be needed on a sustained basis if Afghanistan is not again to suffer the fate that befell it the last time the West disengaged. To realize U.S. interests will require a long term relationship with Afghanistan that accepts the need for continued assistance, albeit at levels far below today's, in the service not just of a better life for Afghans, but of a safer future for Americans.

This longer term vision implies a number of near-term requirements. Among the more important of these is a clear strategy for governance reform; meaningful, measurable progress before 2014 in restraining government predation; and a negotiated agreement with the GIRoA that provides concrete reassurance that our allies will not be abandoned to their fate even as the United States draws down.

To develop this argument I first identify and prioritize America's underlying interests in Afghanistan. I then discuss what these imply for acceptable end states there, and what this in turn implies for the required American role to sustain a stable Afghanistan that can meet our interests in the longer term. I then turn to some consequences of this long-term analysis for several near-term policy issues – especially the utility of permanent U.S. bases in Afghanistan as a part of a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the GIRoA, the attractiveness of substituting a counter-terrorism (CT) strategy for today's counterinsurgency (COIN) approach in light of bin Laden's death, the attractiveness of negotiated settlement as a means of achieving an acceptable end state, and the appropriate sequencing and prioritization of security improvement and governance reform.

U.S. Interests in Afghanistan and South Asia

Of course the United States has many interests at stake in Afghanistan and its region. From the emerging great power of India to the east, to the destabilizing influence of Iran to the west, south Asia and its environs pose a range of economic, humanitarian, and security concerns for the United States. For Afghanistan itself, a variety of American aspirations for human rights, democracy, and economic development are at stake.

But these are not of equal importance. In fact, the central U.S. interest in the region is its nearly unique potential for terrorist violence against Americans. This threat emanates chiefly from Pakistan. Its combination of a deepening internal insurgency, a growing nuclear arsenal, a diverse range of Islamist militant groups including the global headquarters of al Qaeda, a weak and divided government, deep sources of internal instability deriving from a growing population, a stagnant economy, and great asymmetries between wealth and poverty together give Pakistan a well deserved reputation as “the most dangerous place in the world,” as Imtiaz Gul put it.¹ By many measures Pakistan's ongoing civil war is not going well for the government. If Pakistan eventually loses this war, the state collapses, the security services splinter, and the nuclear arsenal breaches containment, this would provide one of the few plausible scenarios in which al Qaeda or its allies could obtain a usable nuclear weapon. Terrorists may gain bases in many ill-governed spaces around the world, including Afghanistan. But only in Pakistan do they pose a serious threat of overturning a nuclear weapon state and gaining access to its arsenal. This is a unique challenge of special magnitude.

¹ Imtiaz Gul, *The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan's Lawless Frontier* (New York: Viking, 2010).

In this context, Afghanistan is important to the United States chiefly in terms of its potential effect on its unstable neighbor across the Durand Line. Pakistan is not only a country of unusual peril for the United States, it is also one where we have unusually limited direct leverage to reduce the danger. U.S. aid to Pakistan can help at the margin, but it is unlikely to be decisive in defeating Pakistan's insurgency. Our ability to go beyond financial aid to training or military assistance is limited by our extreme unpopularity among Pakistanis. We cannot realistically expect to remove the threat by drone attacks on militants, which can eliminate key leaders and suppress terrorist activity if well designed, but are unlikely to defeat whole organizations of hardened militants and guerillas in the absence of a far more effective ground war than the Pakistanis have yet been able to mount. With our ability to make a bad situation much better so limited, it is especially important to avoid making it any worse than it needs to be.

And failure in Afghanistan could make the prognosis in Pakistan much worse. All states worry about instability on their borders. For a state as internally threatened as Pakistan, this danger is far greater than most. The Taliban are a transnational Pashtun movement that is active on either side of the Durand Line and sympathetic to other Pakistani Islamist insurgents. By many accounts, their links to anti-Pakistani militants are growing as these groups expand and seek allies to extend their reach and power.² The Afghan Taliban presence within Pakistan is thus already an important threat to the regime in Islamabad.³ But if Afghanistan descended into chaos, the spillover effects would be far worse. A combination of refugee flows, safe haven in an anarchic Afghanistan beyond Pakistani state control, and the calling in of IOUs by anti-Pakistani militants who had assisted the Afghan Taliban in part to secure the latter's support against Islamabad could eventually be enough to tip an already-unstable Pakistan into collapse. Much has been made of the threat Pakistani base camps pose to Afghan government stability, but this danger works both ways: instability in Afghanistan poses a serious threat to the civil government in Pakistan, and the latter is a greater threat to U.S. interests than the former.

These security interests are real but they are not unlimited. Afghanistan's potential effect on its neighbor is genuine, but indirect. Nor does failure in Afghanistan predetermine failure in Pakistan: if Pakistan puts its own house in order and marshals the full resources of the state behind its own counterinsurgency effort then it could survive in spite of chaos on its border. A series of uncertain events would have to break in unfavorable ways for an Afghan failure to yield a nuclear-armed terror threat from south Asian militants. The consequences for our own security if this chain of events did unfold would be radically grave, but the likelihood of this should not be overestimated. Americans have invested major resources to combat unlikely but grave threats in the past (the Cold War nuclear arms race had much the same quality), but that does not mean we should always do so, or that it necessarily makes sense to do so here. Reasonable people can thus differ on whether our interests in Afghanistan warrant American warmaking to secure, or whether they merit the scale of effort we are now expending.

² See, e.g., Bill Roggio, "Pakistani Taliban enlist 6 local groups in Wana region of South Waziristan," *The Long War Journal*, November 8, 2010, accessed May 9, 2011. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/11/pakistani_taliban_en.php; Shuja Nawaz, "The Perfect Storm in Af-Pak," *The National Interest*, May 9, 2011, accessed May 9, 2011. <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/the-perfect-storm-af-pak-5277?page=1>; remarks of Daniel Benjamin, U.S. Department of State, at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rm/2011/161895.htm>.

³ Albeit one that at least some Pakistanis are willing to tolerate for now as a hedge against the prospect of U.S. failure in Afghanistan (more on which below).

But of the various interests we have at stake in south Asia, its unique terrorist potential is the only one that might merit conducting or continuing a war. And if one judges that the war is worth waging, then it makes sense to prioritize an acceptable outcome to that war above other economic or political interests in the region.

Defining “Success” in Afghanistan: End States that can Meet Our Core Interests

Clausewitz taught that war is a means to political ends, which implies that the standard for measuring success in war should be whether the outcome secures the political interests at stake. If our interest in the conflict is partly that Afghanistan not again become a base for terrorists to attack us directly, but largely that Afghanistan not become a base for destabilizing Pakistan, then the right definition for success in the war is that it yields an Afghanistan which averts this. Of course there is a much wider set of ambitions America would seek for Afghanistan, as it would for any country. Americans would like Afghanistan to be ruled in accordance with the will of the governed, for its people to be prosperous, and for minority and women’s rights to be respected. But the vital national security interests for which the waging of war might normally be justified are narrower, and focus on denying Afghanistan as a base for transnational terrorism and subversion.

Our original aims in Afghanistan were much more ambitious. The 2001 Bonn Agreement committed the United States to pursue a remarkably centralized democratic state with almost all meaningful governmental functions held by the national government in Kabul. This design would have minimized the danger of warlordism, enabled centralized protection of human rights even in Afghanistan’s conservative south, and empowered a modernizing center with the authority to develop the country through rational investment in national economic infrastructure. If this agenda could be realized it would be an ideal outcome. But ten years into a costly and destructive war, its very ambition has put it effectively beyond our reach.

This scale of ambition, moreover, is unnecessary to secure our core interests. A variety of less centralized, and possibly less democratic, alternative end states could still provide the critical requirement of an Afghanistan that does not threaten us or its neighbors. Two such alternatives are decentralized democracy, and internal mixed sovereignty.⁴

Decentralized Democracy

Decentralized democracy would delegate a variety of authorities now held in Kabul to the periphery. This would surely include the power to make and execute budgets, to utilize traditional alternatives to centralized justice systems for some offenses, to elect or approve key officials who are now appointed by Kabul, and could presumably extend to local revenue collection or regulatory authority.

Greater local autonomy would promote buy-in from populations who distrust distant Kabul, and would exploit a preexisting base of legitimacy and identity that’s stronger at the local than the national level.

⁴ For a more detailed discussion, see Stephen Biddle, Fotini Christia and J Alexander Thier, “Defining Success in Afghanistan: What Can the United States Accept?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (July-August 2010), pp. 48-60.

Foreign policy and internal security, however, would remain with the central government, which would prevent more-autonomous localities from using their territories to support international terrorism or insurrection against the State.

Accountability would be obtained chiefly via transparency, and electoral or legal sanction: as with centralized democracy, the will of the governed would be the *ultima ratio*, and governance would be designed to promote the people's ability to detect misbehavior and punish it by voting out miscreants in free and fair elections. To the extent that provincial and district governorships acquire significant additional powers, these offices would need to be elected, or subject to tight oversight by elected councils empowered to enact meaningful sanctions. And watchdog provisions would be needed to ensure that these elected bodies have the information they need to enforce the public will. Other matters, such as civil disputes and minor criminal cases, could continue to be handled by the traditional justice system if local communities prefer.

This option should be acceptable to the United States. Its core reliance on democracy and transparency is consistent with basic American values and ambitions in the international system. Localities with freedom to reflect local preferences may adopt social policies that many Americans would see as regressive, but the opposite could also occur, with some places implementing more moderate norms than those favored by a national majority. By promoting local acceptance of the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) by Afghans, this option removes much of the *casus belli* for insurgency. And it preserves a central state with the power and incentive to deny the use of Afghan soil for attacking the US or destabilizing Pakistan, thus securing the critical minimum US security stakes in the conflict.

On balance, decentralized democracy should offer a significant improvement in the odds of success – because it exploits the greater natural legitimacy of local authority in Afghanistan and the greater availability of existing resources at the local level. Overall, though it offers no easy guarantee of success, decentralized democracy promises a real prospect of an acceptable outcome if the international community is willing to pay the price in the form of sustained counterinsurgency, major assistance in Afghan governance, and a vigorous anticorruption campaign.

Internal Mixed Sovereignty

An internal mixed sovereignty model would decentralize even further by allowing localities to adopt any system of government as long as they respect a handful of constraints imposed by the center. Like decentralized democracy, it would delegate many powers now held in Kabul to the provincial or district level. It differs in granting local authorities the additional power to rule themselves without transparency or electoral sanction as long as three key “red lines” are not crossed by the local government.

The first such red line would forbid local authorities from allowing their territories to be used in ways that violate the foreign policy of the state—and especially, it would ban terrorist or insurgent base camps that could threaten Pakistan, the U.S., or its other allies. The second would bar local authorities from infringing on the rights of neighboring localities (such as seizing assets across provincial or district boundaries, or diverting water resources upstream in violation of covenants). The third would discourage localities from generating massive illicit revenues through land grabs, large-scale theft of international customs, widespread

narcotics trafficking, or exploitation of state-owned natural resources without license. Beyond these limited restrictions, local authorities would be free to run their localities as they see fit, whether this reflected the expressed will of the governed or not, and to engage in lower-level corruption without federal sanction. Central authorities in Kabul would thus retain absolute control over foreign policy and the ability to make war, limited authority over inter-provincial commerce, and the ability to prohibit land grabs and enforce narcotics, customs, and mining laws, but almost all other powers and authorities would be ceded to the local government, including the power to rule without interference from the center on any matter other than the observance of explicit red lines.

This freedom to select the manner of government without interference as long as red lines are not crossed would potentially enable local strongmen to run provinces and profit from corruption. The absolute requirement that certain behaviors are off limits, however, restricts true sovereignty by ceding to the center some sacrosanct powers—especially, the control of foreign policy and the ability to make war internationally. Hence sovereignty is mixed in this variant to a much greater degree than in the other options explored above: many, but not all, of the ordinary powers of sovereign governance would be delegated to the provincial or district level.

This option would signal a much more serious break with the overall direction of the Afghan state as conceived in 2001. In many ways, it would be an acknowledgement of de facto arrangements since 2001 and acceptance of a delimited form of strong-man rule in various regions of the country. Many of the governors and other local officials appointed by Karzai have ruled not by virtue of legal authorities bestowed upon them by Kabul, but rather through their own local security and economic power bases operating outside the law but with the tacit acceptance of Kabul.

In areas such as Balkh and Nangarhar, this has resulted in relative security and drastic reduction of poppy cultivation. “Warlord governance” in such places has found a relatively stable equilibrium in which provincial authorities profit from rent-seeking behavior but keep their predation within limits so as to avert a mutually costly crackdown from Kabul.

In other areas, however, strongman rule has undermined stability. In Helmand for example, several years of bad governance that excluded and alienated significant population groups fueled insurgency. Even in the north, tensions have been stoked due to ethnically targeted violence and criminal impunity that marked strongman rule there. To be stable, mixed sovereignty thus cannot amount to partition by another name under local strongmen who can do whatever they wish in private fiefdoms – red line restrictions that preclude the excesses that fuel insurgency are essential.

The attractions of this option are obvious: it is less demanding of rapid institution-building, and offers a closer fit to Afghanistan’s current environment.

However, this option carries risks that make it less consistent with US interests than the previous two. First, governors would have considerable freedom to adopt regressive social policy and abuse human rights. The degree of corruption would also be high – indeed, the opportunity for corruption is an essential part of the system’s attraction for the prospective governors. Again, this is a limited departure from current practice, but would require acknowledging that only moderate change is coming – which in turn may deepen public

grievances or promote renewed insurgency in the future if corruption is allowed to exceed public tolerance. There would also be a constant threat of instability as powerful governors periodically test the waters to see what they can get away with. The central government would thus presumably be called upon for periodic enforcement actions that could require violence if the system is to be kept within its limits of adaptation and tolerance.

This model could nevertheless be viable and meet minimum US security interests, however, if the three key red lines can be enforced. The model offers two key means of enforcement, one being a stick, the other a carrot. The stick is the threat of military punitive action by Kabul to sanction governors in violation, or to destroy base camps when discovered (or both). The carrot is Kabul's control over foreign aid, and ability to direct it to some provinces but not others, as well as the profit potential from local autonomy if the rules are respected. The US would retain influence through its control of foreign aid and its deep engagement with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF); this influence can be used as leverage to keep local authorities' behavior within acceptable bounds.

Afghanistan itself was ruled under a similar model for much of the 20th century: the Musahiban Dynasty lasted for five decades as a nominally absolute monarchy with an ostensibly uniform national code but in which the periphery held a certain degree of autonomy with a modest state bureaucracy and a centrally-controlled army and police force serving mainly to enforce a few key royal prerogatives. The rule of law was generally locally administered and some Pashtun tribes in the south and east were exempted from military service. Tax revenues were primarily levied from foreign trade, foreign aid (starting in the late 1950s), and sales of natural gas to the Soviet Union (starting in the late 1960s) rather than from rural agriculture and livestock. Kabul sought to leverage its international links for resources rather than extracting them from local power centers. But when local leaders were out of line, the center would forcibly intervene to police them. Over time, as government capacity and resources increased, the state was gradually able to extend its writ.

The mixed sovereignty model, however, faces implementation challenges all the same – especially the need to rein in the worst excesses of today's malign power brokers, and the need to constrain illicit economic activity. Without regulation, unrestrained abuse of power on today's scale is a major contributor to the insurgency. If mixed sovereignty is merely a gloss for more of the same, it will fail. The model requires a bargain in which power brokers refrain from destabilizing, grand-mal abuses in exchange for a share of foreign assistance and local revenues, and freedom from federal enforcement and sanction. Today's strongmen, by contrast, enjoy nearly complete freedom to exploit with little risk of sanction; even a mixed sovereignty model will thus require coercive effort to compel acceptance of its half-a-loaf relative to today's entire bakery for the corrupt. And for aid incentives to be meaningful, they must comprise a meaningful fraction of total economic activity. Today, the narcotics trade, for example, is so large as to threaten the power of outside aid as an incentive for compliance. It will require important effort to shrink narcotics trafficking, illicit natural resource exploitation, and other theft of public resources to a manageable scale.

Other significant drawbacks are its potential for instability and its consignment of many Afghans to non-democratic rule. It would backtrack on nearly ten years of U.S. promises for democracy, rule of law, and basic rights for women and minorities, with costs for U.S. prestige in addition to its effects on innocent Afghans. And it would require constant attention to sustain. Properly managed, the internal power

balancing mechanisms of this approach keep it within bounds. But this is a dynamic process requiring continuous, potentially costly management; without this, it could slip into unconstrained warlordism and civil warfare. A workable mixed sovereignty model is thus not a recipe for Western disengagement: not only will it require a continued aid flow, but a sustained political and military engagement will be needed to help maintain internal equilibrium and to promote social justice where possible.

This need for external engagement highlights the importance of regional diplomacy. International consensus building on Afghanistan is critical for stability under any approach. But the dynamic quality of internal mixed sovereignty and the particular weakness of its central government make it a potential magnet for foreign interference and a source of regional instability if Afghanistan's security is not embedded in a workable regional security framework with real buy-in from its neighbors.

Unacceptable Others

Many other outcomes are possible – but fail to meet core U.S. security requirements. Partition, whether de facto or de jure, would involve the country's breakup into ethnic substates. The likeliest such split would divide the Pashtun south from the largely Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara north and west. A poorly designed reconciliation deal with inadequate safeguards on Taliban authority in the south could closely approximate a form of de facto partition along these lines. Any such partition could easily yield safe havens for cross-border terrorism and insurgency, as seen elsewhere in such cases as Iraqi Kurdistan's use by the PKK to attack Turkey, or the use of Congolese border havens to attack neighboring Rwanda. Regional proxy battles, and internal competition for control of Kabul and key border areas add further incentives for instability to any partition scheme.

Alternatively, Afghanistan could return to the atomized civil warfare of the 1990s. An anarchic Afghanistan would resemble the conditions that led to the Taliban takeover and basing of al Qaeda in Afghanistan in the 1990s, or present-day Somalia, where lawlessness has promoted Al Shabaab, a violent, Al-Qaeda supported Islamist movement.

In principle, Afghanistan could become a centralized dictatorship, whether by the Taliban or someone else. But any real consolidation of power in the hands of a single strongman is a highly unlikely scenario in post-2001 Afghanistan where political, military, and economic power is dispersed among numerous power-brokers backed by competing regional interests. In this environment, any prospective dictator, whether pro or anti-US, would have great difficulty preventing a subsequent descent into civil war. A coup d'etat or other anti-democratic power grab is entirely possible, but is very unlikely to yield stability in its wake.

The U.S. Role in a Stable, Acceptable Afghanistan

What do these end states imply for the role the United States would have to play in order to obtain them and sustain them over time? Today, the U.S. role in Afghanistan is ubiquitous and central. If U.S. troops, money, and advisors were withdrawn the Karzai government would be unlikely to survive for long. Moreover, this view is widely held among Afghans, Pakistanis, and the Taliban – it is not just an American academic perception. Unfortunately, many in the region now believe that this U.S. role, though necessary, is unlikely to be sustained until a stable outcome is obtained, and that this will lead to an eventual collapse of the

government and either a Taliban takeover or an extended civil war. Some have argued that this perception encourages the enemy to hunker down and wait us out. A bigger problem, however, is its effect on our allies: it encourages them to hedge their bets in ways that make success less likely.⁵

For Afghans, a critical example of this hedging is corruption and government predation. Corruption is common in the developing world, but not on Afghanistan's scale: Somalia is the only country on the planet that exceeds Afghanistan on Transparency International's corruption index.⁶ This is not some deep product of ancient cultural norms or tribal social structure – the scale of this problem is the result of a recent, calculated response to the expectation that the government will soon fall.⁷ Since the United States handed the war over to NATO in 2003, many Afghan officials and local powerbrokers came to the conclusion that they would be abandoned and that the government would then fall. This impression was reinforced by the President's announcement of a July 2011 date for the beginning of U.S. troop withdrawals, but the underlying perception was already widespread by the time the 2011 date was unveiled. This judgment that the government would fall and the system would collapse provides a powerful incentive for predation. On the one hand, it makes patient, long term investment in an honest, democratic future very risky: the system could easily collapse before such patience bears fruit, leaving the honest with nothing. At the same time it encourages the powerful to steal now while they still can: if the gravy train will end in three years, that leaves only a short time in which to amass enough wealth to build a comfortable exile abroad for the aftermath. These dilemmas make it very difficult to combat corruption and predation as long as Afghans expect abandonment and collapse. And no stable, acceptable Afghan end state is possible with today's scale of corruption: even internal mixed sovereignty requires an enforceable cap on the take. Without the ability to contain predation, success is impossible; bet hedging by Afghans makes predation extremely hard to contain.

For the Pakistanis, such hedging includes tacit support for the Afghan Taliban, whom the Pakistanis rely upon to ensure a friendly government in Kabul if the United States leaves too soon. An Indian-aligned Afghan government would be a disaster in most Pakistanis' eyes; U.S. success might build a pluralist GIROA that could prevent the country from becoming an Indian pawn, but U.S. failure would leave Pakistan badly exposed, and to many Pakistanis the latter looks more likely than the former. Hence they protect the Haqqanis, the Quetta Shura, and others. Most counterinsurgency theorists see outside havens as a major advantage for insurgents; as long as the Pakistanis protect the Afghan Taliban as a hedge it will be very difficult to end the violence.

⁵ Avoidance of moral hazard requires a balance between a credible promise to support one's ally if they do what is necessary themselves and a credible threat to sanction them if they do not. At the moment, the chief problem in Afghanistan is the lack of a credible promise, as can be observed in the scale of hedging behavior ongoing in the region. But success will require credibility in *both* directions: reassurance alone, without conditionality and a believable threat of sanction in the absence of reform, is insufficient. It is worth noting that the threat of withdrawal is not the only, or the best, form of sanction – in fact, any of the manifold forms of U.S. aid and assistance can be a source of leverage if made conditional on specific Afghan reforms.

⁶ *Corruption Perceptions Index 2010* (Berlin, Germany: Transparency International, 2010).

⁷ Plus, of course, the scale of foreign assistance and ill-managed contract money flowing into the country after 2001 and especially after NATO began reinforcing its military presence after 2005, which provided a rich target array on which corrupt power brokers could prey, with little real oversight to constrain the predation.

We can try to reduce this hedging with pressure, oversight, or persuasion, and indeed we have tried all three for years now (albeit with varying seriousness). But as long as the underlying perception in the region remains the expectation of abandonment, there will be a strong rational incentive for self-interested actors to hedge via Afghan predation and Pakistani support for the Afghan Taliban. And this will make it very hard for the U.S. to change these behaviors.

This leaves us with a dilemma. We cannot sustain today's role forever. But the more emphasis we put on drawing down our presence, the more we fuel the perception that we'll leave too soon, the more bet-hedging we can expect as a result, and the lower the odds of success.

The Administration has eased this dilemma somewhat by shifting its emphasis from the 2011 drawdown onset to the 2014 target for transition to Afghan lead security responsibility. This helps clarify that the United States is not in the midst of a precipitate rush to the exit, which eases the pressure on South Asians to hedge. A Strategic Partnership Agreement that codifies a longer term U.S. relationship with and role in Afghanistan can also help a great deal (more on this below).

Also necessary, however, is greater clarity on our long term objectives and the end states we can accept. Today's ambiguity promotes confusion in the region, undermines the credibility of the commitments we *are* willing to make, and encourages pessimists to believe that our goals are misaligned with our willingness to pay and that we will eventually give up. Only if we can identify an end state whose resource requirements are bearable can we possibly commit ourselves credibly to provide the resources needed. And if we cannot make a credible commitment, we will promote hedging strategies that make any acceptable outcome nearly impossible.

What U.S. role would the end states described above require? Our original goal of a radically centralized democracy was so ambitious that it would now require an impractical U.S. investment – this is effectively beyond reach.

Decentralized democracy is less demanding, but would still require major exertions in population security and governance reform. It is difficult to be specific without a troop-to-task analysis that would be beyond my scope here. But it seems reasonable to expect that the U.S. resource requirements would be substantial, and would require a major U.S. troop presence for years to come.

Internal mixed sovereignty is less attractive but also less demanding, at least by degree. By accepting but regulating the existing practice of strongman rule in many parts of the country, this model would reduce the scale of governance transformation required and would be closer to historical experience. And strongly enforcing a restricted set of redlines against warlords and other power brokers would give them incentives to moderate the destructive excesses that today drive many Afghans toward the Taliban. A mixed sovereignty model would be less dependent on administrative transparency and efficiency, and hence less demanding of international mentoring, oversight, monitoring, and technical assistance. Even internal mixed sovereignty, however, would require hard fighting to secure. And it cannot succeed without a major effort to rein in the *scale* of today's predatory misgovernance and cap its virulence.

Internal mixed sovereignty would thus probably be less costly to *obtain* than decentralized democracy. But it could require a greater U.S. investment to *sustain* than a decentralized democracy would.

It is hard to see any stable Afghan outcome without some kind of sustained U.S. role. Afghanistan was at peace for most of the 20th century, but it was a major recipient of international economic aid throughout that period, and given its limited revenue base for the foreseeable future it will surely require some degree of continued aid to be viable in the 21st.⁸ A decentralized democracy would need continuing technical and financial assistance in governance and development, but the natural checks and balances it would feature would build in an important measure of stability. Such a system would be designed to enable local shuras or councils to oversee public expenditure, and popular dissatisfaction with the Taliban even in the Pashtun south could be expected to restrain local officials from the ideological extremes of the previous Taliban regime, or from empowering militants to engage in international terrorism. This would give Afghans with a natural incentive to oppose militancy the political power to constrain it.

Internal mixed sovereignty, by contrast, has weaker natural balancing mechanisms. In fact it should be assumed that Afghan power brokers will regularly test the limits of the bargains they have reached with Kabul, especially in the system's early years. Vigorous enforcement would thus be necessary to prevent predation from returning to today's intolerable levels. The sticks and carrots described above could, in principle, be sufficient to persuade profit-motivated strongmen to stay within their limits as long as violation does, in fact, yield sanctions painful enough to be bad for business, as it were. But this is a dynamic process requiring continuous, potentially costly management; without this, it could slip into unconstrained warlordism and civil warfare. And this management will require U.S. assistance for the foreseeable future – partly to provide (or catalyze) the aid flows needed as carrots, partly to provide the training and technical assistance needed for the ANSF to suffice as a stick, partly to help monitor compliance in the periphery, and partly to encourage Kabul to use both the carrots and the sticks energetically. A workable mixed sovereignty model is thus not a recipe for Western disengagement. It might enable a somewhat quicker U.S. military drawdown in the near term than other options, but it could demand a greater and more complex long-term economic and political engagement to sustain than other options would.

Implications: the Utility of a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the GIROA

This assessment of long run U.S. interests and potential end states for Afghanistan poses a variety of implications for near-term policy questions. Among them is the utility of a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the GIROA. The United States is now conducting negotiations with the Karzai government over such an agreement to frame the long term relationship between the two states. A detailed analysis of preferred

⁸ From 1960-9, Afghanistan received, on average, the equivalent of \$247 million/year in international aid, in 2011 dollars; from 1970-9 it received an average of \$269 million/year: OECD (<http://stats.oecd.org/qwids/>), assuming inflation figures taken from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm. By 1973, foreign grants and loans provided two-thirds of annual Afghan government revenue: Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Political and Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 205.

terms or negotiating positions in these talks is beyond my scope here. But the discussion above implies several important roles such an Agreement should play, and some considerations for critical sub-issues.

In particular, it would be extremely useful if these talks could assure South Asians that a post-2014 U.S. troop drawdown will not leave Afghanistan abandoned and at the mercy of an empowered Taliban. As I argue above, many in the region (Pakistanis, Taliban, and other Islamist militants as well as loyal Afghans) now believe the United States and other foreign powers will leave Afghanistan before defeating the Taliban, and that this will lead to an eventual collapse of the government and either a Taliban takeover or an extended civil war. The hedging incentives this creates are deeply problematic; success probably requires some change in this widespread expectation of abandonment, and greater clarity as to America's long term intentions for Afghanistan and the region. A more consistent, more explicit communications strategy would help – many Afghan officials are now confused about American intentions and objectives, and this confusion is aggravated by conflicting U.S. statements about our commitment to counterinsurgency or other state-support policies. But in the final analysis a real change in regional perceptions will probably require actions rather than just words.

One such action would be for the actual U.S. drawdown rate to be slow rather than fast. Many Afghans, for example, misinterpreted the President's 2009 West Point speech to mean that there would be no U.S. troops remaining in Afghanistan by 2012. This perception was remarkably stubborn; in a 2010 visit to Kabul, I found even members of Afghanistan's Parliament and analysts from Afghan think tanks convinced that we would be gone by 2012. For some, only the actual observation that American troops remain will convince them that they are not on the brink of abandonment and collapse.

Another helpful action, however, would be to conclude a Strategic Partnership Agreement that committed the United States to a long term role that could combat this perception of looming exit. This need not take the form of a commitment to permanent bases or a permanent military presence, though it could. But it would need to make it clear that the United States does not intend to repeat its policies of the 1990s, in which we left Afghanistan to its own devices after the Soviet withdrawal and did little to avert open civil warfare. A strong agreement with an explicit commitment to continued U.S. engagement could go a long way toward reducing the incentives to hedge bets that are now so corrosive in the region – and this in turn could substantially improve the prospects for near-term governance reform in Afghanistan or realignment of Pakistani policy toward the Afghan Taliban.

Should this Agreement provide for permanent U.S. bases or a permanent U.S. military presence? While detailed prescription for negotiations is beyond my scope, some points are clear. First, given our interests in the region, the primary criterion for this choice should be stabilizing Afghanistan, not broader concerns with power projection or the conduct of counterterrorist missions beyond Afghanistan's borders. I treat the viability of an Afghan-based CT strategy below. For now, though, it is worth noting that Afghanistan is far from an ideal base for regional power projection. As a remote, landlocked nation with mountainous borders and unreliable and/or unstable neighbors astride the natural lines of communication to seaports, Afghanistan is a highly imperfect base for projecting power elsewhere. As the bin Laden raid showed, it *can* be useful, especially for small-scale raids of short duration, but the real issue is not whether it has some advantage under some circumstances but whether the difference between Afghan bases and the next-best alternative is large or small under normal conditions. Even for the bin Laden raid, alternatives were under

active consideration that would have involved air attacks from bases far from Afghanistan; many, apparently including the Secretary of Defense, actually preferred these to a plan that relied on SEALs flown from Jalalabad. For most purposes in most scenarios, there are alternatives to Afghan bases for power projection missions – whether these be bomber strikes from the continental United States; missions flown from regional bases in places such as Diego Garcia or elsewhere; carrier-based aviation; or cruise missiles launched from submarines or other naval platforms offshore. And given the difficulties in maintaining logistical support for sustained action from Afghan bases, these alternatives are likely to look reasonably competitive for many contingencies. Afghanistan may be better for some purposes at some times, but it is unlikely to be so much better as to be indispensable as a base.

Second, and related, permanent bases should be seen as negotiable in the talks. An important argument in favor of permanent bases is their ability to reassure nervous Afghans. But some Afghans see permanent U.S. bases as intrusion and interference, or as an infringement on Afghan sovereignty. If the net result of an insistence on permanent bases is to inflame anti-American sentiment in Afghanistan and undermine Afghan support for the war, this downside would outweigh any plausible military benefit to the U.S. – and it could end up impeding, rather than advancing, the underlying logic of reassurance. The Taliban, for their part, will surely oppose any permanent foreign military presence and will present this as an obstacle to negotiated settlement of the war. Reconciliation negotiations pose complex challenges and may or may not prove fruitful (more on this below). But if they otherwise show promise, the cause of stability in south Asia could be better served by removing a barrier to negotiating progress than by retaining a power projection platform that is little superior to its alternatives. It is thus a mistake to view permanent U.S. bases as a redline requirement that must be preserved in any negotiations, whether with the GIRoA or with the Taliban.

The chief point is thus that permanent basing is a means, not an end. The end is a stable south Asia via a stable Afghanistan, and the primary role of any Strategic Partnership Agreement should be to serve that end by reassuring Afghans and others that they will not be abandoned. If in the course of the negotiations over the Agreement such bases look useful as tools of reassurance, they should be offered. But they are not ends in themselves of any superordinate importance.

Implications: Counter-Terrorism, Counterinsurgency, and the Death of bin Laden

Many have proposed the the United States shift from a counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy to one based on counter-terrorism (CT). Whereas COIN is focused on sustaining the host government by securing its population, CT is focused on removing threats to the U.S. homeland by killing or capturing terrorists and their leaders. And whereas COIN is labor intensive and expensive in lives and dollars, CT can in principle be much cheaper, relying on small numbers of drone strikes or special forces raids without the multi-brigade, long-term ground commitments required for COIN. If our primary interest in Afghanistan is in fact to reduce the terrorist threat to America, would it not make more sense to pursue this directly and cheaply via CT rather than indirectly and expensively via COIN?

The answer is no, and the reason is that CT depends on the host government cooperation that COIN is designed to secure. The binding constraint on CT effectiveness is normally intelligence on the targets' whereabouts. This intelligence normally requires access on the ground. The raid that killed bin Laden, for

example, depended on information gained from patient, long-term surveillance of the compound by human agents operating from a safe house in Abbottabad, and elsewhere in the country.⁹ The Secretary of State has reported that we also relied upon cooperation from Pakistani intelligence, based on their own human source networks on the ground.¹⁰ This access on the ground is vastly harder if the local government is actively hostile and seeks to exclude us. Moreover, our ability to use drones or other long-dwell airborne surveillance systems to complement ground-based sources depends heavily on permissive airspace; if a hostile government with access to an air force and ground based air defenses chose to close its airspace, then our ability to use platforms like UAVs would be greatly reduced and we would have to fight for aerial access in ways that would greatly increase the cost and difficulty of the campaign while reducing its effectiveness.

CT is also much more effective against small bands of terrorists or discrete sets of senior commanders than it is against large guerilla forces in the field; it is ill-suited to defend governments from broad insurgencies without a supporting COIN effort involving large friendly ground forces. If we shifted from COIN to CT in Afghanistan and withdrew the ground forces now critical to the COIN campaign, the Karzai government could collapse before the CT leadership targeting campaign bore fruit. And this would risk losing the ground and air access that effective CT requires.

An explicit shift to a CT strategy would also aggravate the hedging problems noted above. Many Afghans already fear that the United States will shift from COIN to CT; to them, a U.S. CT strategy looks like a plan to allow Afghanistan to fall into chaos while the United States flies above it all with drones hunting for terrorists. This is an extremely unpopular image among Afghans, for whom it offers nothing but the prospect of endless internecine warfare. Occasional comments by U.S. officials suggesting that a CT approach would be preferable to COIN are thus read by Afghans as evidence that abandonment is coming. Even if the Karzai government did not fall in the immediate aftermath of an actual U.S. shift from COIN to CT, we could expect limited cooperation with such an agenda from the Afghans, who would be strongly motivated to seek accommodation with the Taliban under such conditions, and disinclined to support an American CT campaign with intelligence or other cooperation on the ground.

As complementary elements of a joint campaign, COIN on the ground and leadership targeting from aircraft and special forces strengthen one another synergistically. But CT without COIN risks losing the prerequisites needed for its success. The ultimate purpose of our efforts is indeed to counter terrorism. But to do this well requires that we secure the governments whose support we need to conduct effective CT. Hence it is a mistake to see these as substitutes for one another: CT and COIN strengthen one another; CT without COIN is unlikely to work.

A related argument raised since bin Laden's death is that his removal might warrant a shift away from COIN that would otherwise be unwise but can now be tolerated. If our ultimate purpose is to combat an al Qaeda terror threat to the United States, then the effort would become unnecessary if the threat were removed. More broadly, the investment warranted in Afghan COIN is surely a function of the virulence of the al

⁹ Greg Miller, "CIA spied on bin Laden from safe house," *Washington Post*, May 6, 2011, accessed May 9, 2011.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/cia-spied-on-bin-laden-from-safe-house/2011/05/05/AFXbG31F_story.html.

¹⁰ David Gollust, "Clinton: Pakistan Cooperation Helped Find bin Laden," *Voice of America*, May 2, 2011, accessed May 9, 2011.

<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/usa/Clinton-Stresses-Pakistan-Cooperation-After-bin-Laden-Killing--121092289.html>.

Qaeda threat: the lower the latter, the smaller the former. If al Qaeda's effectiveness is attenuated enough, then eventually it must make sense to invest less in Afghan COIN even if this isn't as effective as a larger effort would be. If not, then we are committed to a permanent war with vast resource requirements and no conceivable way out. It must therefore be possible to identify a condition of "success" such that we can stand down from this scale of effort; some see this success in bin Laden's killing.

The problem here is twofold. First, it is too early to know what effect bin Laden's death will have on al Qaeda. Most terrorist organizations survive decapitation. The United States, for example, killed the head of al Qaeda's Iraqi affiliate, Abu Musab al Zarqawi, in 2006; he was replaced, and the violence continued. Israeli leadership strikes against Hamas and Hezbollah have hardly destroyed either organization. Russian efforts to kill Chechen separatist leaders failed to defeat the separatist movement. There are exceptions: the Shining Path in Peru withered after the arrest of Abimael Guzman in 1992; Aum Shinrikyo was greatly weakened by Shoko Asahara's arrest in 1995. In general, however, decapitation campaigns can weaken terror groups by replacing talented leaders with less able successors, but they rarely destroy the organization.¹¹ Perhaps al Qaeda will follow the Shining Path exception; bin Ladenism was probably in some degree of general decline by 2011 given its reduced popularity in the Arab world as a result of its indiscriminate killing of Iraqi and other Muslims and its irrelevance in the ongoing Arab Spring uprisings. Maybe bin Laden's death will be the straw that breaks this camel's back and leads al Qaeda into terminal decline. Certainly it is worth careful monitoring of al Qaeda's operational tempo and internal unity in coming months to look for possible evidence. But this would be the exception rather than the rule, and it is far too early to know whether al Qaeda will follow such a trajectory.

Second, the unique role of Pakistani instability and nuclear capability warrants special caution. Unlike most terror threats from most places, Pakistani militant groups have the potential to gain access to nuclear weapons if the host state collapses. A small remnant of an attenuated al Qaeda somewhere else would pose a limited threat to the United States; a remnant that shared bin Laden's strategy of targeting America and got access to a usable nuclear weapon in the chaos of Pakistani state collapse could pose a threat far exceeding their numbers or nominal strength. Similarly, non-al Qaeda groups pose unique perils in Pakistan. An organization like Lashkar-e-Taiba that has not heretofore been focused chiefly on the United States could nevertheless pose an exceptional threat if the Pakistani government collapsed and lost control of its nuclear arsenal. The stability of Pakistan is especially worrisome with a healthy al Qaeda posing an explicit threat to the United States from its territory, but Pakistani stability is unusually important to the U.S. even if al Qaeda per se withers or dies altogether given the ongoing presence of other militants with the potential to shift their focus to the United States, and prospective access to nuclear weapons if Pakistan collapses.

This does not mean that al Qaeda's fate is irrelevant to the case for COIN in Afghanistan, or that no attenuation in the Pakistani terror threat could warrant drawing back from COIN to CT (even if the latter proved less effective without the former). But it does mean that it is too early to conclude that such a shift is

¹¹ On the effectiveness of CT decapitation campaigns, see Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Jenna Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," *Security Studies*, Vol. 18 (2009), pp. 719-755; Daniel Byman, "Do Targeted Killings Work?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, no. 2 (2006), pp. 95-111.

warranted now. And it does mean that unusual care is warranted in assessing a COIN to CT shift in Afghanistan given its potential effect on Pakistan and the latter's unique status.

Implications: the Utility of a Negotiated Settlement

Many insurgencies end in negotiated settlements involving some degree of compromise on both sides.¹² As public dissatisfaction with the war has grown, interest in such a settlement has grown, too. The Afghan war poses a number of challenges to negotiated resolution, including the number of parties to any such talks, the likelihood of internal disunity within several key Taliban factions, opposition among northern Afghans, growing radicalization of actors such as the Haqqani network, ideological commitment by Mullah Omar and key leaders of the Quetta Shura, and the difficulty of knowing whether any given Taliban negotiating partner actually speaks for his faction or others. By the same token, however, President Karzai has expressed clear interest in pursuing a settlement. And the death of Osama bin Laden may remove some barriers to negotiation, whether by releasing Mullah Omar or others from oaths of loyalty to bin Laden that would have made reconciliation impossible, or by affecting Taliban morale and expectations.

Among the more important factors shaping the prospects for negotiation are our aims and ambitions. The original, highly ambitious U.S. goals virtually precluded settlement. Perhaps a Taliban on the verge of total military defeat might accept terms that would exclude them from any meaningful role in a centralized, strictly democratic government, but if so the settlement would be little more than the surrender instrument for a beaten insurgency. It is hard to imagine any major Taliban faction accepting such terms until the military tide turned clearly, decisively, and conclusively against them. To have any chance for hastening the war's end via negotiation, we will have to accept compromises even as we demand them of the Taliban.

We can, in fact, live with a degree of compromise relative to our original war aims while preserving the central security stakes for which we have fought. We do not require either the radical centralization or the strictly democratic system the 2001 model prescribed. There is room for some legal political role for the Taliban within the Afghan government without undermining our fundamental security requirements as long as the limits and enforcement mechanisms discussed above are maintained. It should be possible, for example, to offer designated seats for some representatives of some Taliban factions in the Afghan Parliament, or in Provincial or District governments in the south or east, as long as there are practical, enforceable limits on their ability to use territory as a safe haven for militant violence.

The Taliban are not, and never have been, a popular movement with a broad base of support. In repeated polls over years of surveys, they have never drawn more than about 15 percent support nationally. Even in their birthplace of the conservative Afghan south they remain a minority preference, and elsewhere their

¹² Estimated historical frequencies of negotiated settlement range from as low as 20 percent to as high as about 50 percent; the rate of settlement appears to have been rising since the 1970s. See Ben Conable and Martin C. Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2010), RAND MG 965, pp. 18, 169; Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson, "Rage Against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars," *International Organization*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Winter 2009), pp. 67-106.

support varies from modest to negligible.¹³ This makes them unlikely to agree to lay down their arms in exchange for a chance to run for national office in free and fair elections; some extra-democratic set aside of seats or offices or positions would probably be needed to persuade them to settle. But this also means that the prospects for containing their influence once brought into the government are reasonably strong as long as the non-Taliban GIRoA has something to offer its citizens as an alternative to freely elected Taliban rule.

And this in turn means that reining in government predation is a necessary component of any acceptable negotiating strategy. Corrupt predatory governance is the chief threat to public acceptance of the GIRoA. If a deal gave the Taliban a legal foothold in an Afghan government too corrupt to command its people's loyalty, this could be tantamount to admitting a Trojan Horse: continued predation by non-Taliban officials could eventually swing public support to a legalized Taliban that promised honesty and justice even at the cost of its ideology and repression. If so, then an initially limited, constrained role could grow into one that threatened U.S. core interests by enabling Taliban officials the scope to foment terrorism from Afghan soil. If government predation can be brought under control – not eliminated but at least capped and constrained – then the Taliban can be given a legal role in Afghan politics with the natural unpopularity of militant ideology acting as a check to strengthen other constraints on their ability to foment terrorism. But if not then a settlement could leave us unable to ensure that our interests were met in the aftermath.

Implications: the Need for Governance Reform

Finally, this implies that the needed governance reforms cannot be put off indefinitely. It is tempting to assume that the near-term requirement for security can safely be allowed to push governance reform into the distant future. And there are near-term tradeoffs between security and reform that can encourage the former to displace the latter: many malign powerbrokers in Afghanistan maintain militias or other security forces that they make available to Coalition commanders to reinforce our security efforts in exchange for our overlooking their economic exploitation of the population. Others use private security firms under their control to protect logistical convoys that supply Coalition troops, or they make protection payments to the Taliban or other local militants to ensure safe passage; if we crack down on their economic predation, their continued security cooperation is unlikely, and they can be expected to turn on us instead. With an urgent need to reverse Taliban military momentum by contesting their control of important districts, there is constant pressure on Coalition commanders to postpone the needed reckoning to a future when we hope we will have the flexibility to clamp down on corruption in a safer environment.

But in fact we cannot safely delay an aggressive governance campaign. Not only would this risk undermining any prospective reconciliation deal, as noted above. But it also undermines our ability to provide a degree of security that could actually permit us to draw down our forces and hand off to a capable ANSF. Civilians systematically dispossessed by a predatory government will inevitably turn to the Taliban for succor (and

¹³ The Taliban's strongest poll performance to date was a finding of 45 percent support in Kandahar that was reported in a Washington Post/ABC News/BBC/ARD survey of November 2010: see "New poll reveals Afghan perceptions of the war," *Washington Post*, December 6, 2010, accessed May 9, 2011. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/world/AfghanPollResults.html>. More common is the figure of 11 percent support nationally in the same poll – or for Kandahar itself, the finding of 25 percent support in a Canadian survey of April 2010: see "Taliban support strong in Kandahar: poll," *CBC News*, April 6, 2010, accessed May 9, 2011. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2010/04/06/taliban-support-poll.html>.

the Taliban have been very astute in exploiting this to position themselves as the defenders of the dispossessed), even if they otherwise dislike the Taliban's ideology or politics. If civilians who have been wronged – or expect to be – continue to do this, no density of security forces will be sufficient to exclude the Taliban from victimized communities.

Worse, there may be reason to expect that the ANSF itself will be coopted in ways that undermine its ability to take over security duties as we draw down. Security forces are products of the societies from which they are drawn. Where the society around them is dominated by the political and economic effects of malign patronage networks, it is unrealistic to expect that the security forces will somehow be hermetically sealed off and unaffected by this. Malign actor networks realize that they need top cover and protection for their activities; it would be dangerous for such predators to allow powerful armed forces in their midst to operate without some degree of control or cooptation by the network. And this gives Afghan powerbrokers a strong incentive to extend their reach and their influence into the police and the army.

Historically, where armies in the developing world fail it is normally not because they have not yet taken the right training courses or had sufficient rifle ranges, advisors, or equipment available. The most important cause of failure in developing-world militaries is their politicization and corruption at the hands of the regime and its patrons. When the officer corps is politicized and corrupted, its ability to motivate effective combat action by its troops is powerfully undermined. Troops know when their leaders value political connection and graft above professional competence and service to the mission. No soldier wants to die for a corrupt chain of command, and no soldier wants to put his life in the hands of an officer who cares more about his connections than his military skills. The result can easily be a hollow army or police force, whose size or equipment does not reflect its actual capability, and whose ability to hold ground or defend population centers is much less than meets the eye.

In Afghanistan today, police corruption is a known problem, and considerable efforts are underway to monitor this and remove corrupt leaders. The Afghan National Army (ANA), on the other hand, is commonly assumed to be mostly free of corruption and more effective in the field. This may well be true for now (though we know less than we might about the problem of politicization in the ANA today; since this has not been a high priority concern heretofore, it has thus received much less intelligence attention and command oversight than has the problem of police corruption). But the ANA is unlikely to remain unaffected if the surrounding society remains as dominated by corruption as it is now. Whatever the effectiveness of the ANA today, if we do not address and delimit the problem of corruption and misgovernance in Afghanistan soon we risk undermining the efficacy of the military tool that we are relying upon to take up the slack as we draw down.

It is thus a mistake to assume that security and governance reform are separable, and that the former can safely precede the latter. The McChrystal assessment report argued that security and governance reform were co-equally necessary for success; this is as true today as it was in 2009, and implies a need to ensure that progress in one is not allowed to outstrip progress in the other.