CHAPTER SEVEN

Afghanistan

Introduction

The inclusion of Afghanistan in a study of transition from successful counterinsurgency to stability operations may be unconventional. Certainly, counterinsurgency in Afghanistan has yet to succeed, much less transition successfully to stabilization. This chapter provides back-
ground for the current situation and examines the reasons that there has not yet been a successful transition from COIN to stability.

Following the Taliban’s refusal to turn over Osama bin Laden for his role in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with the intention of destroying al Qaeda and its Taliban shield and support structure and preventing continued use of the territory as a safe haven for terrorist activity.\(^1\) On October 7, U.S. and British forces, with the aid of Afghanistan’s internal anti-Taliban rebels (the Northern Alliance), began a military campaign against the Taliban to “disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime.”\(^2\) In December 2001, after less than three months of fighting, Taliban leaders surrendered the organization’s final territory in Afghanistan. For the next several months, U.S. troops, in combination with a multinational coalition and increasing numbers of Afghan forces, launched a series of offensive operations into the southern and eastern provinces of the country in an attempt to remove the remaining presence of Taliban and al Qaeda and establish conditions necessary for stability and reconstruction activities. By early 2002, the Taliban appeared to have been shattered and there was no sign that an insurgency was imminent.

International and local focus then shifted to rebuilding the Afghan nation. At the UN-directed Bonn Conference in 2001, Afghan political factions established a timetable for the creation of a representative and freely elected government.\(^3\) As part of the agreement, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a multistate coalition, was created to provide security and support to the fledgling Afghan government in Kabul. Months later, the United States and other nations met

to outline the requirements for Afghanistan’s security sector reform. The UK agreed to lead the counternarcotics effort; Italy offered to run the judiciary; the United States volunteered to train the Afghan military and border security service; Germany pledged to train the police force; and Japan agreed to direct the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants.\footnote{U.S. Government Accountability Office, \textit{Afghanistan Security: Efforts to Establish Army and Police Have Made Progress, but Future Plans Need to Be Better Defined}, Report to the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO-05-575, June 2005, p. 5.}

The clearing campaigns of 2002 and 2003 largely resulted in the Taliban, al Qaeda, and other foreign jihadists resettling in nearby Pakistan, where they were able to rest and regroup. Despite lingering militant activity in the region, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Afghan president Hamid Karzai had declared the end of major OEF combat operations by late 2003; in 2004, several commanders claimed the military campaign and associated reconstruction efforts had succeeded against the Taliban.\footnote{Kenneth Katzman, \textit{Afghanistan: Current Issues and U.S. Policy}, Congressional Research Service, Report RL30588, December 3, 2002, pp. 7, 23.} Attention turned to ensuring political stability and enhancing the capacity of indigenous Afghan forces to establish their own security.

From mid-2002 onward, the Taliban, reinforced by al Qaeda militants, began to reconstitute themselves. Although attempts to destabilize both presidential and parliamentary elections in the fall of 2004 and 2005 were thwarted, the trajectory of insurgent violence was steeply upward. By 2006, the Taliban’s overall ability to cause violence on Afghan territory had increased by 400 percent since their defeat in 2001.\footnote{RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents, May 20, 2011.} Throughout 2006, coalition and ANA forces deployed to disrupt insurgents’ activities, deny them sanctuary, and prevent their ability to regain strength. Despite high numbers of casualties, the Taliban often resisted in a more coordinated manner than anticipated. Campaigns undertaken by the forces from the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which had assumed command

\footnote{RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents, May 20, 2011.}
of ISAF, could not permanently quell the insurgency; attacks continued and intensified in regions where stability and reconstruction operations were slated to commence.

**Key Domestic, International, and Transnational Actors**

Following the overthrow of the Taliban government, the United States supported the new government and deployed thousands of troops, mainly fulfilling counterterrorism roles in support of OEF, to Afghanistan in order to eradicate insurgent activity as well as to help the political authority exercise and extend its authority.

In addition to brokering dialogue among international and domestic Afghan parties to facilitate agreement on an interim and more permanent Afghan government, the UN, through the Security Council, created the International Security Assistance Force in January 2002. A series of Security Council resolutions also guided NATO’s takeover of ISAF and approved its expansion beyond Kabul. Additionally, the UN established the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to direct and integrate humanitarian, relief, recovery, and reconstruction activities in support of the Bonn Agreement. NATO expanded the stabilization force’s presence in a series of stages to the northern (October 2004), western (September 2005), southern (July 2006), and eastern (October 2006) regions of the country.

A new constitution, followed by presidential and parliamentary elections in 2004 and 2005, established the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA). GIRoA selected the ministers to direct and build up the leadership capacity of the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF). One problem that plagued the Afghan government from its earliest days was the lack of capacity and knowledge of effective government process. In their early days, for example, ministries consisted of a few repatriated senior Afghans with almost no employees.

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Following the dispersal of the Taliban in 2001, a mixed group of insurgents launched a concerted effort to oust the Afghan government and coerce the withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces from Afghanistan. Opposition groups included, but were not limited to, the Taliban, Hezb-i-Islami, the Haqqani network, and foreign fighters. This chapter focuses predominantly on the Taliban for three reasons. First, when accurately defined, true Taliban loyalists do have an agenda of state disruption, as well as the ability to compel more transient Taliban sympathizers or intimidated populations to act upon that goal. Second, the Taliban is the only group with a real ability to contest the state. Not only did the Taliban hold power in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, it also maintains a shadow government with provincial- and district-level officials and its own justice system. Finally, the Taliban threat is numerically superior to other threats, both in terms of foot soldiers involved and attacks believed to be perpetrated.

After losing bases in Afghanistan as a result of OEF, the international al Qaeda organization took up residency in Pakistan, where it relied on its extensive support network to regroup and rearm. While efforts to rebuild and stabilize Afghanistan were starting, assistance from al Qaeda and other jihadist networks was enabling the Taliban and other opposition groups to rebuild, amplify, and sustain their operations against coalition forces and the Afghan population.

According to RAND’s Seth Jones, “Every successful insurgency in Afghanistan since 1979 enjoyed a sanctuary in Pakistan and assistance from individuals within the Pakistan government, such as the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI).” From Pakistan, opposition groups were able to transport operatives and supplies, recruit and train fighters, and launch and direct operations.

Stabilization Attempt

Incumbent Strategy
At its topmost level, coalition strategy has always espoused three basic lines of operation: security, development, and governance.

**Security.** After OEF ousted the Taliban from power, the United States, UN, NATO, and indigenous political factions collaborated to create a national government, with power initially concentrated in Kabul and subsequently extending its influence and control outward. Coalition forces conducted operations with several missions—mainly peacekeeping and to a lesser extent, counterinsurgency—while assisting the reconstruction effort as the government built up the capacity to independently rule and provide stability.

**United States.** The U.S. military contribution began with OEF, a counterterrorism campaign aimed at seeking and destroying Taliban and al Qaeda strongholds in Afghanistan. Upon entering the country, Special Operations Forces (SOF) and CIA operatives blended with members of the Northern Alliance to collect intelligence and support the joint American-British air campaign. The Taliban relinquished its territory in Afghanistan within a few months, possibly more quickly than anticipated. As the focus of the U.S. government turned to planning for an additional conflict in Iraq, debates ensued regarding the most advisable way to stabilize Afghanistan. Some believed an international peacekeeping force deployed throughout the country was imperative to ensuring long-term security; others argued that a continued counterterrorism role superseded the need for the United States to participate in nation-building. They preferred to restrict the peacekeeping mission to Kabul, as part of ISAF’s remit.

The United States concluded that the latter strategy, known as a “light footprint,” was most favorable, given its current and pending warfighting commitments. In 2002, the United States deployed three conventional brigades consisting of soldiers, airmen, helicopter

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assault crews, and close air support to Afghanistan. These forces did not serve a direct peacekeeping function; they mainly acted in parallel with the international peacekeeping effort to conduct counterterrorism operations—tracking and engaging Taliban and al Qaeda insurgents. This continued counterterrorism strategy was partly based on historical precedent—the U.S. government wanted to prevent the large-scale resistance that was experienced by the Soviets in the 1980s; it also “ultimately believed that small numbers of ground troops and airpower, working with Afghan forces, would be sufficient to establish security.”

The effect of the initial so-called “light footprint” approach cannot be overstated. By mid-2002, the United States had no more than 8,000 military personnel in Afghanistan; this in a country of some 30 million people whose government and security forces had been shattered the year before. The decisions of 2002 meant that for roughly three years the number of troops (U.S. and later NATO) in Afghanistan would remain low. The low number of troops meant that the ISAF had limited ability to provide security in the region around Kabul. There was very limited ability to provide security elsewhere in the country, except for a modest presence in some of the larger Afghan cities. This inability to properly secure the country was a key factor in the increase in lawlessness and the return of the Taliban.

In 2002 and 2003, as the United States devoted ever more resources to prepare for and wage war in Iraq, equipment and personnel critical to the counterterrorism effort in Afghanistan dwindled, inhibiting the ability to sustain the transition to stability operations. The U.S. failure to properly resource the effort in Afghanistan, however, was not due solely to the demands of the invasion of Iraq. The United States took the same approach to Iraq in 2003. The problem was not limited resources but opposition to conducting stability operations. The focus of U.S. forces remained the same, with the Pentagon continuing to “view the situation in Afghanistan as one of counterterrorism, not counterinsurgency, and conduct operations accordingly.”

11 Jones, *In the Graveyard*, p. 117.

In late 2003, the newly designated U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan worked with the commander of U.S. forces to cement an updated, broad U.S. military strategy for its presence in the country. By focusing on the demilitarization of the militias, and weakening the warlords, the strategy proposed a shift from counterterrorism operations to nation-building and COIN. As a result of this new strategy, two regional command centers were established in the south and east of the country, with one brigade assigned an area of operations spanning the territory. U.S. troops were tasked with securing and protecting the population and providing a military presence more integrated with civilians. This new strategy “recast U.S. and other coalition units to fight COIN instead of counterterrorism missions.” However, the small number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan in 2002–2004 made it impossible to provide security for the population outside a few major cities.

UN/ISAF/NATO. The notion of a multistate peacekeeping force was developed during the Bonn negotiations as a way to protect the interim government in Kabul and enable reconstruction and stabilization operations, with the understanding that the responsibility to provide security to the nation rested ultimately with the new government, when it could build up an army and a police force. ISAF was officially established in December 2001 to “assist in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding areas” and “could, as appropriate, be progressively expanded to other urban centers and other areas.” Details concerning force size, mission, possible expansion or withdrawal timelines were not mentioned.

The United Kingdom led the multistate effort to negotiate ISAF’s duties with Afghan parties, resulting in a Military Technical Agreement (MTA) that “formalized the understanding between the stabilization force and local forces regarding roles and missions, expectations, size of the forces, rules of engagement and other aspects of an international

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13 Jones, *In the Graveyard*, p. 141.
14 Jones, *In the Graveyard*, p. 142.
force’s presence in a region.” The ISAF mission outlined in the MTA was broad: “[T]o assist in the maintenance of the security” in Kabul and its environs, the “area of responsibility.” The agreement also listed a nonspecific set of probable tasks “relating to assisting the Interim Government in achieving stability in Kabul by means of creating a security force.” References to humanitarian assistance, expansion beyond Kabul, and withdrawal of militias in Kabul (a criterion promised at Bonn) were absent.

As pressure mounted on the Afghan interim administration to expand ISAF, U.S. officials relented. Turkey maintained the force’s original strategy when it took control of ISAF in mid-2002; ISAF continued to assist in the development of Afghan security forces and structures while supporting the reconstruction effort. Although ISAF could “conduct local and small-scale relief efforts in its area of operations, the force was not equipped, nor did it have the mandate, for large-scale policing or humanitarian aid operations.” After assuming command of ISAF from Turkey, Germany made some clarifications to the MTA. When assisting in the maintenance of security in Kabul, ISAF was now required to “liaise with political, social and religious leaders to ensure that religious, ethnic and cultural sensitivities in Afghanistan are appropriately respected within ISAF operations.”

NATO agreed to take over ISAF command in mid-2003. Despite pressure from Karzai and the UN, before the takeover NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson insisted that an extension of the mission beyond the capital was “not on the table.” However, a few

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months into NATO’s tenure, the UN Security Council unanimously approved a resolution authorizing the peacekeeping force to send troops anywhere in the country. This decision was attributed to several factors. First, the security situation had worsened: NGOs, UN personnel, and others were reporting a rise in armed attacks on humanitarian workers in the Afghan provinces. Second, NATO’s prospective ability to lead and recruit more troops from coalition members elicited confidence from donor countries. U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte, then UN Security Council president, explained that the “U.S. had proceeded cautiously . . . about expanding ISAF because of a lack of countries willing to contribute troops for such a mission. ‘Now NATO has taken this force over and there is a willingness, at least to a limited extent, to undertake missions outside of Kabul. And in that context we were willing to support such a resolution.’” 22 Third, the resolution was considered critical to disarming factional militias and ensuring safe presidential and parliamentary elections. 23

ISAF incrementally expanded its presence by assuming command of efforts presided over by provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), the primary instrument through which international aid had supported reconstruction projects. By December 2005, the force had extended to the north, the west, and partially the south of Afghanistan, when defense ministers met to revise ISAF’s operational plan. Building on ISAF’s increased footprint, which now included Regional Area Commands, larger forces and supporting elements were donated to ISAF in anticipation of the more operationally challenging environments in the south and east of the country. Critically, the revised operational plan “outlined clear arrangements for enhanced coordination and deconfliction between ISAF’s stabilization mission and OEF counter-terrorism mission.” 24 This plan created new command arrangements between ISAF and Combined Forces Command Afghanistan,

23 Synovitz, “Afghanistan.”
enabling closer coordination and reducing overlap between the two organizations’ operations. ISAF and OEF continued to have separate mandates and missions; ISAF was a stabilization and security force while OEF served a counterterrorism role. Having no stabilization expertise outside of Europe, NATO was ill-prepared to take on the stabilization and security mission.

**GIRoA: Internal Reforms and Security Forces.** Afghanistan does not have a history of strong central government. This reality has certainly had a major impact on the ability of the post-2001 government in Kabul. The centuries-long tradition of weak central government compared to strong alliances to tribes and armed local leaders (“warlords”) undermines the ability of the central government in Kabul to exercise authority and to make policies that have national relevance. Additionally, Afghanistan is a very poor country, with the third-lowest per capita gross domestic product in the world. Therefore, the resources available to the government are at best modest, which in turn limits the government’s ability to develop programs that have significant meaning for the average person’s life, particularly if that person lives far from a major city where the government’s influence is greatest. Corruption and a massive narcotics underground economy further constrain the government’s ability to make needed reforms.

Afghanistan’s indigenous security forces were in need of rehabilitation when the U.S.-backed Karzai administration took power. Various regional, ethnic, and private militias had replaced the professional Afghan army after it disintegrated in 1992, and had since wielded substantial control throughout their associated territories. After the Taliban fell, commanders of the various militias tried to further their independent aims at the expense of the elected government. One such militia leader, Mohammed Qasim Fahim, leveraged the assistance his forces had given U.S. troops during the initial OEF campaign to secure his post as Karzai’s defense minister. He subsequently refused to disarm his forces in Kabul, a criterion set forth in the Bonn Agreement.

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contending that his private militia would form the core of the future Afghan National Army (ANA).27 Fighting between rival militias and inertia to demobilize hampered progress of building the ANA.

The Afghan National Police (ANP) had similarly atrophied over the course of two decades. To help the Afghan government rebuild its security sector so that it could eventually provide essential safety services to its people, in April 2002 the United States and other donor nations outlined a five-pillar agenda for Afghanistan’s security sector reform. The United States pledged to train the Afghan military and border security service, and Germany agreed to train the police force.

The new ANA was to be ethnically balanced, voluntary, and made up of 70,000 individuals. Command posts were designated for Kabul and other strategic locations. Although defense planners did not set a deadline for the completion of the army, U.S. and Afghan officials collaborated to develop an ANA force structure that included 43,000 ground combat troops based in Kabul and four other cities; 21,000 support staff organized in four sustaining commands (recruiting, education and training, acquisition and logistics, and communications and intelligence); 3,000 Ministry of Defense and general staff personnel; and 3,000 air staff to provide secure transportation for the president of Afghanistan.28 The missions slated for the ANA were to “include providing security for Afghanistan’s new central government and political process, replacing all other military forces in Afghanistan, and combating terrorists in cooperation with coalition and peacekeeping forces.”29

As lead donor, the United States oversaw the development of the ANA force structure, decision processes, and garrisons; provided equipment; and constructed command facilities. Although recruitment and training programs made progress and accelerated, combat troops were regularly underequipped and unsupported following the completion of their training.

29 GAO, Afghanistan Security.
The new ANP was to be a multiethnic, sustainable, and countrywide 62,000-member professional police service that extended throughout the provinces and districts outside of Kabul to enhance security and reinforce the rule of law. No deadline was established for completion of this force. Since the United States does not have an in-house capability to train domestic security providers, the U.S. State Department contracted with DynCorp Aerospace Technology to train and equip the police, advise the Ministry of Interior, and provide infrastructure assistance, including constructing several police training centers. The Pentagon also provided infrastructure and equipment to police in border regions. In addition, Germany established a training program for police officers at the Kabul Police Academy.

The effort to rebuild the Afghan security forces was inadequate in the 2002–2006 period, particularly in the case of the police. Initial efforts at rebuilding and reforming the Afghan security forces were overly biased toward the Army, with far less emphasis on the ANP. This was a significant error. Historically, the police have been a critical component in combating insurgents. In many ways the police represent the first line of defense against insurgents because they are closely connected to the population—usually much more so than the military. Additionally, Afghanistan was (and still is) beset with lawlessness and lack of government presence and control. Had more early emphasis been placed on improving the numbers and capabilities of the ANP, it may have been more difficult for the Taliban to regenerate in the southern and eastern parts of the country.

**Development and Governance.** While development and governance have typically been viewed as separate lines of operation in Afghanistan, in practice, good governance has been considered a prerequisite for effective development, and development projects were seen as a way of selling the population on the proposed government. Therefore, in describing Afghan and international strategies in this area, we have chosen to combine the two.

Afghanistan’s initial governance plan was the Bonn Agreement of December 2001. The principal part of that document deals with

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governing authority and the power-sharing agreement necessary prior to the first election. UN assistance was to consists of several types of tasks, including peacekeeping in the city of Kabul, assisting as necessary in the setup of the government in Kabul, assisting with reconstruction and development, and reintegrating militia fighters into the Afghan military force. At this conference, the size of the Afghan Army was set at 50,000 and the police set at 62,000.  

The Bonn Agreement must be understood as the direct consequence of the combat operations that had been and were still taking place. Rather than settle the major issues of the time, the Bonn Agreement set forth a process that was in theory to lead to settlement. A rush to legitimacy meant that the players to the agreement were hand-picked by the UN, rather than representative of the people. The UN representative to the talks, Lakhdar Brahimi, supposedly stated frequently, “no one would remember how unrepresentative the meeting had been if the participants managed to fashion a process that would lead to a legitimate and representative government.” The principal players in the discussion of Afghanistan's future were the commanders of the Northern Alliance—warlords and tribal leaders who had opposed the Taliban—and elite Afghan expatriates, particularly the royalist faction of former monarch Zahir Shah.

Having established a process that was intended to install a representative government, the parties next turned to reconstruction of the impoverished and war-ravaged country. One of the earliest actions taken with respect to a strategy for development in Afghanistan was the request for a quick-turnaround needs assessment for the country by the World Bank, the UNDP, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). This needs assessment was followed by a multitude of conferences, assessments, and groups. The next major conference in the Bonn Process was the Tokyo International Conference on Reconstruction.

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Afghanistan Assistance to Afghanistan, held January 21–22, 2002, where donors made pledges of aid to meet the needs assessment’s $2.1 billion high estimate for first-year reconstruction costs, and a total of $5.2 billion over an unspecified time frame.33

During this period, the interim government of Afghanistan wrote and began circulating a National Development Framework, intended to provide a basis for budgeting actions and donor commitments. This paper emphasized the need for Afghan ownership of development, citizen participation, and a development program nested in rule of law and public accountability.34 This approach was ratified in principle in the UN General Assembly Report, “The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace And Security,” which explained this desire to empower the Afghan government as the logic for the “light footprint” approach.35

Strategies for governance in Afghanistan have experienced a rhetorical, if not wholly realized, shift in Afghanistan since 2001. The Bonn process, which focused on the national level, was given mixed reviews. Development documents, such as the National Development Framework, hedged their bets by advocating both a capable national government and direct engagement of the masses in the processes of reconstruction.

By 2003 it was already becoming clear, particularly to aid workers, that the security situation had deteriorated to the point where the provinces had become fairly lawless. There were a number of calls for a focus on subnational governance, inspired by popular reaction to the consolidating but corrupt government and by the expansion of NATO, which had brought international forces face to face with provincial

realities.\textsuperscript{36} Ironically, emphasizing the provincial and district level in some cases resulted in greater direct international involvement, as in the case of the governor of Helmand being replaced at the reported insistence of the British.

The deteriorating security situation in 2003–2005 helped undermine the value and effectiveness of economic aid. While a considerable amount of U.S. and other foreign aid funding was arriving, in many cases it was not effectively used. The poor security situation in the southern and eastern parts of the country, lack of capacity of the Afghan government (whether in Kabul or the local jurisdictions) to manage the funds, and widespread corruption all undermined the reconstruction effort.

**Anti-Coalition Militant Strategy**

Essentially, the insurgent strategy was to break the political will of the United States and its coalition partners, coerce the withdrawal of their forces, and oust the foreign-backed government from Afghanistan.

From September 2001 to March 2002, the insurgents conducted defensive operations in response to coalition efforts to overthrow the Taliban and to conduct follow-on missions and stability operations. By April 2002, they were regrouping and began to orchestrate a series of offensive operations. Taliban forces deployed in larger numbers over time, especially in such southern provinces as Helmand; however, the guerrillas deployed in smaller units as well. This indicates that the Taliban were progressively able to operate more freely in the south and resist detection by Afghan or coalition forces.\textsuperscript{37}

In 2004, the targeting focus of opposition groups seemed to shift from hard targets, such as coalition forces, to soft targets, such as


\textsuperscript{37} Jones, Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, p. 51.
Afghan police and personnel reportedly collaborating with the Afghan government or coalition forces. Experts contend that the larger, more viable fighting force that the Taliban faced over time made softer targets more attractive.38 This targeting strategy helped to discredit those who worked with coalition forces, contributed to the defeat of reconstruction efforts, and forced the evacuation of coalition forces.39

The insurgents primarily utilized asymmetric tactics, which included yielding the population centers to U.S. and Afghan forces, operating from rural areas, and distributing propaganda to the local population and opposition forces.40 They also relied on violence and intimidation to prevent NGOs and aid workers from delivering on reconstruction and humanitarian promises.41 As the insurgent campaign mounted, jihadist rhetoric and tactics, such as suicide bombings, as well as insurgent methods borrowed from the Iraq war, such as IED attacks, were increasingly used.42

The Taliban also received assistance from external actors. They utilized ties to al Qaeda and other jihadist networks to rebuild, sustain, and amplify their operations against coalition forces and the Afghan population. Al Qaeda assisted opposition groups at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels and provided impetus for the use of suicide attacks and sophisticated IEDs.43 Furthermore, some al Qaeda members blended with Taliban units and shared tactics from operations in Iraq and Chechnya.44

In line with the Pakistani government’s past involvement with various Afghan opposition groups, members of the ISI and other gov-

40 Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, p. 50.
44 Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, p. 66.
ernment agencies provided two main types of assistance to the Taliban. The first form of assistance was resources—medical aid, training, intelligence, financial assistance, arms, ammunition, supplies, and logistics (in crossing the border). The second was the freedom to operate; after insurgents lost their Afghanistan base, they found a reliable, fertile, safe haven from which to recruit, train, fundraise, transport supplies, and stage operations. The adjacency to Pakistan of critical Afghan border towns had serious implications for the Taliban.

Many of the Taliban's strategies vis-à-vis development and governance have been negative: sabotaging development projects, intimidating the population to deter participation in government, and more. But The Taliban have taken some positive actions. One example is the Taliban justice system, an effort by the movement to dispense low-cost, sharia-compliant justice in the villages. Taliban judges run circuits through the country to provide this convenience, in stark contrast to the slow and centralized Afghan courts. And while the country's nascent justice system is seen as corrupt, religious judges are not.

As the Taliban's strategy matrues, it has begun to establish a shadow government, with governors and severe penalties for corruption and inefficiency. While the population may live in fear of the Taliban, it also provides a measure of stability and predictability. Imran Gul, a Pakistani NGO worker, believes the Taliban's appeal is in providing “peace, income, a sense of purpose, a social network.” These efforts represent an emerging strategy to out-administer the GIRoA, rather than simply disrupt its influence.

External Powers

Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda aimed to spread extremist global ideology to Afghanistan and Pakistan. It utilized its substantial financial resources, influence, and tactics learned in past experiences to act as a force multiplier for the Taliban regime in return for permission to


train operatives and plan operations on Afghan soil. The organization did have a different point of focus than the Taliban—while most of the opposition groups remained focused on Afghanistan, al Qaeda and its affiliates remained committed to fighting the United States and its global allies, including the Pakistani administration and presence in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

Pakistan. For two decades, Pakistan has sought to extend its influence in Afghanistan, at times through the support of various armed groups, including the Taliban. Pakistan’s interest in Afghanistan has stemmed from its need to protect its territorial integrity on the western flank. The Durand Line, which forms the border between the two countries, is a colonial artifact and creates an artificial division between tribes that are themselves not friendly to the Pakistani nation. Following the September 2001 terrorist attacks, the United States needed support in the region and enlisted Pakistan as an ally in the war on terror. It was believed that Pakistani forces could address the situation in the North-West Frontier and Baluchistan provinces, areas from which insurgents have staged offensive operations in Afghanistan in the past. Early efforts by President Pervez Musharraf to curb militant groups, enforce order, and reform the radical madrassas that had served as extremist recruiting centers at first appeared successful; unprecedented counterterrorism campaigns were conducted by thousands of Pakistani regular and paramilitary troops deployed to the country’s border region. Although these operations were somewhat effective against al Qaeda and non-Pakistani militants, they did not accomplished much toward containing the Taliban.

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47 Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*.


Although top U.S. officials praised Pakistan for its cooperation, doubts regarding Islamabad’s core interests persisted. Pakistan’s mixed record on battling Islamist extremism included a tolerance of Taliban elements operating from its territory.\textsuperscript{52} The Taliban continued to control training camps, staging areas, recruiting centers, and safe havens in Pakistan. The significant portion of the Afghan insurgency’s political and military leadership living in the border regions benefited from technical and operational assistance provided by transnational extremists also located there, as well as ethnic and political support from Pakistan’s Pashtun population.\textsuperscript{53}

Some attributed Pakistan’s lack of decisiveness in containing the Taliban to political unrest in the country, claiming it had forced Islamabad to scale back its operations against the militants. However, reports continued to indicate that elements of Pakistan’s major intelligence agency and military forces were aiding the Taliban and other extremist forces as a matter of policy; such support may even have included the provision of training and fire support for Taliban offensives.\textsuperscript{54} State backing of the Afghan insurgency was suggested to have both ideological and geostrategic motivations; some in the Pakistani government may have sympathized with the jihad against U.S. and other Western forces; others may have wished to preserve a Pakistani foothold in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{55}

Pakistan’s ineffectuality against insurgents using its territory as a sanctuary in which to regroup and expand their influence across borders has directly contributed to the instability in Afghanistan and continues to be the primary external barrier to defeating the insurgents in Afghanistan.

\textbf{Iran.} Despite harsh rhetoric between Washington and Tehran, Iran’s policy toward Afghanistan—funding reconstruction projects, providing aid to various warlords—did not change as result of the “axis

\textsuperscript{52} Kronstadt and Katzman, \textit{Islamic Militancy}, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{53} Jones, “Averting Failure in Afghanistan,” p. 121.

\textsuperscript{54} Kronstadt and Katzman, \textit{Islamic Militancy}, p. 7; Rubin and Armstrong, “Regional Issues,” p. 33.

\textsuperscript{55} Jones, “Averting Failure in Afghanistan,” p. 121.
of evil speech” or the Ahmadinejad presidency. However, Iran has viewed its involvement in Afghanistan as a hedge against a possible deterioration of U.S.-Iranian relations. There was some evidence that individuals from the Iranian government provided arms and training to Taliban commanders and other insurgents, and several experts have speculated that Iran harbored members of al Qaeda. But these claims have been denied by both the Iranian and Afghan governments, and Iran’s historically poor relations with the Taliban support this repudiation. In any case, if there was Iranian support for opposition groups in Afghanistan during this time period, it was insignificant compared with that provided by the other external state and nonstate actions mentioned thus far.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Initial Stabilization Attempt

In the wake of the apparent banishment of the Taliban, the international community’s primary concerns were adjudicating between warlords and crafting the advanced institutions of a modern state. The anti-Taliban faction that had helped to achieve victory had become fractious; each warlord and militia leader sought Kabul as a feather in his cap. With many thousands of militia forces underemployed, fostering a neutral government in Kabul seemed a productive objective. For their part, Afghan expatriates supported the use of the 1964 constitution of King Zahir Shah’s reign as an interim constitution, but that document treated Afghanistan as though it were a cohesive state, which it plainly was not. The mismatch among the foundational documents of the republic, the preoccupations of international parties, and the competition between the factions in the government proved disastrous in terms of creating strong beginnings for the Afghan rehabilitation effort.

57 Milani, “Iran’s Policy Toward Afghanistan”; Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, p. 60.
Reviewing the multilateral needs assessment, it is obviously naïve in places—resting on rapid growth and “modernism” and relying on the Afghan government budget to set guiding principles for recovery.\(^59\) This, despite the fact that surging economic growth and a government capable of setting such budget priorities were far from assured. The capacity-building and community involvement strategies envisioned by the document certainly never came to pass, but they may have been buried under a hodgepodge of suggested “immediate actions” that ranged from establishing a police force to providing limbs for the disabled, creating a civil air traffic control system, and appointing gender advisors.\(^60\) One major mistaken assumption was that there would be a distinction between the end of combat operations and the beginning of reconstruction, but in practice the former coexisted with, rather than gave way to, the latter. There was no distinct post-conflict phase.

While the focus on Kabul and on Afghanistan’s expatriate, often technocratic, elite may have seemed reasonable at the time, it reflected a deep misunderstanding of power structure in the country. This misapprehension resulted in a sense of disillusionment about the capabilities of Afghanistan’s government, and was one of the reasons that the Afghan government was largely circumvented in the delivery of assistance.

Had donor nations used their funding authorities to develop sustainable programs for the bulk of the population, the negative effects of short-circuiting the legitimate government might have been mitigated. Instead, a great deal of focus was given to the process of delivery on pledges, which was complicated by the different budgetary cycles of the partners and a multitude of funding vehicles. While the international community concentrated on meeting these initial pledges, it didn’t allocate them for projects according to the vision of the multilaterals’ needs assessment. Nor did donor nations subscribe to the strategic plan for Afghanistan drafted by the interim government in early


\(^{60}\) Asian Development Bank, Appendix: Immediate Actions, p. 56.
2002; instead, the bulk of aid, some 60 percent, went to humanitarian activities rather than the reconstruction projects recommended in strategy documents. This was due to a continuing drought and the higher than expected numbers of returning refugees. While the money was nobly given, it was no substitute for long-term reconstruction aid. What money did go to reconstruction efforts was predominantly spent on education, support for internally displaced people and support to refugee return, rather than on programs that would develop institutions more broadly. As mentioned earlier, much of the aid that was provided was lost due to corruption and the inability of the Afghan government—and the coalition—to adequately manage those resources.

The interim government’s strategy seems to have been flawed in a number of respects. First, the constitution and government established during the Loya Jirga process favored centralized authority, rather than a parliamentary system or one with more distributed authority. Though the early government was derived from factions handpicked by the U.S. and other coalition members, the two-stage Bonn process did nothing to increase the representative nature of the government or move it from the path of heavy centralization. Instead, it was a contest of wills between Pashtuns and other factions, and between resident and expatriate elites.

The second major weakness of the government strategy was the lack of bureaucratic capacity in the ministries and in sub-national positions. When the government was reestablished, ministries were created on paper and quickly staffed with former bureaucrats from previous regimes. Those who were brought back in were typically senior officials, while the rank-and-file positions were either unfilled or staffed with those who had no capacity. Although the National Development Framework specifies a need for capacity-building assistance, it presumed a fully capable state in the goals it laid out, namely a state that would

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Provide security, invest in human capital, and articulate and implement a social policy focused on assistance to the vulnerable and excluded and the elimination of poverty. [The government] must create an enabling environment for the activities of the private sector, make effective use of aid to attract trade and investment, and put the economy on a sustainable path to growth.  

With respect to governance at the provincial level and below, Afghanistan’s premier think tank has said simply, “subnational state-building in Afghanistan has been characterized by a lack of a subnational governance policy.”

**Defining Victory**

One of the most serious problems with the international effort in Afghanistan was the almost total lack of criteria for defining victory in the context of this study—establishing lasting stability. In the areas of governance and development, no attainable vision for a viable state was ever arrived at. In a 2005 campaign plan, Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan defined its endstate as

- Moderate, stable and representative, though understanding that Afghans will not copy U.S.-style institutions
- Representative of all responsible elements in Afghanistan and formed through the political participation of the Afghan people
- Capable of effectively controlling and governing its territory
- Capable of implementing policies to stimulate economic development
- Willing to contribute to a continuing partnership with the U.S.-led coalition in the global war on terror.

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Such an explicit statement of U.S. objectives is rare, most documents have simply tended to speak about indefinitely continuing lines of operation. But this document still lacks qualifications: what constitutes representative? How much of the population needs to be involved to be representative? How effectively does it have to control its territory? Is this country more like Switzerland, or Bangladesh?

**Reasons the Initial Attempt to Transition Toward Stability Failed**

**Factors That Resulted in Failure**

In this section, we move from symptoms to disease, aggregating the various apparent weaknesses of the coalition effort to attempt to understand at a higher level why these failures occurred. In assessing the recent history of the country it becomes clear that any perceptions of stability were illusory. The plan put forward by coalition partners in the wake of the Taliban’s ouster collapsed from within, encouraged along by insurgents who capitalized on disarray.

When the Taliban regime collapsed in late 2001 and early 2002, it appeared that the main objectives of Operation Enduring Freedom had been achieved. Indeed during much of 2002 it appeared that there would not be an insurgency. It appears that the U.S. and its coalition partners believed that with relatively limited effort stability would return to a still-poor Afghanistan.

By late 2002, however, it was clear that the Taliban was returning and starting to threaten the new, still very weak, U.S.-backed government in Kabul. The assumptions of a swift move to stability in Afghanistan were shown to have been overly optimistic. By mid-2003 an increasingly serious insurgency was underway.67

That U.S. and coalition forces will eventually achieve a transition from insurgency to stability is not a foregone conclusion. The initial mission for ISAF forces was certainly conceived as a stabilization mission, committing ISAF forces to conduct all five of what the

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67 Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, pp. 27–32.
U.S. considers to be the key tasks of stabilization: establish civil security, establish civil control, restore essential services, provide support to governance, and provide support to infrastructure and economic development.\(^6\)

Operation Enduring Freedom was conducting counterinsurgency operations at least as early as 2005, although the strategy is attributed to 2003.\(^6\) The ISAF mission in its initial stages was conducted entirely at the national level, with forces stationed only in Kabul. While still in a dangerous environment, there were neither offensive nor defensive operations conducted. The decision to expand ISAF’s mandate throughout Afghanistan likely had more to do with the counterinsurgency in Iraq and the need to fully resource the conflict there than with any desire to conduct counterinsurgency in the Afghan hinterland.\(^7\) Nevertheless, that expansion did involve both offensive and defensive operations in addition to the stabilization tasks already in the mandate.

The failure to transition toward stability occurred because of three major oversights in the coalition approach. These oversights are interlocking and reinforcing, and some operational level evidence of instability may have multiple strategic antecedents.

**Inappropriate Strategy.** In the case of Afghanistan, strategic-level decisions were made to use a “light footprint,” but although the avowed reason to do so was to empower the Afghan people to take charge of their futures, realistically much of the choice was driven by the desire of the international community for a labor and resource lean approach.\(^7\)

In the absence of a robust stabilization strategy, the focus of the conflict devolved to operations, where each operational authority was


\(^6\) Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan, “Campaign Plan Briefing,” p. 5.


left to its own devices. Performance was patchy across the country, with many military commanders focused on direct action, rather than population-centric measures. This is true for both the initial, special forces-led effort and the expanded conventional U.S. and NATO role: seeking to engage the enemy, rather than the population in an attempt to stamp out Taliban and al Qaeda members.

The proclivity for direct action had an analog in development. While the international community paid lip service to the idea of the Afghan-led development strategy, what money was turned into actual projects went directly to international actors, rather than to the Afghans. Having thus bypassed any strategic plans for aid, the money went primarily for quick impact projects (QIP), CERP funds, and other quick fixes. These programs have generally failed in their goal to increase support for a pro-government and coalition status quo. As USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI), the U.S. government’s premier organization for the conduct of aid in emergency situations, found in its 2005 report:

There is no evidence that relationships between citizens or between citizens and local authorities have been significantly affected by attempts to promote participatory democratic processes in local project selection, implementation, and monitoring. Afghan communities have a long tradition of local control by landowners and strongmen that are not easily affected by governmental service provision. This is especially true if projects remain focused on quick-impact infrastructure, in which traditional elites can easily speak for the community as a whole.72

Rather, development professionals have found that

The tactical deployment of aid risks undermining the higher policy goal of state-building, overstates the transformative potential of

development, and fails to appreciate the processes through which legitimacy is constructed in the Afghan context.73

Similarly, governance-related assistance below the national level generally fell to military commanders in the field to execute. One hotly debated decision was the replacement of the governor of Helmand in 2006 just as the British were taking charge of the NATO mission there. The national government blamed the British forces for insisting on the governor’s removal on grounds of corruption, an act that ultimately had a critically destabilizing effect on the province’s security.74

There was also no way to clearly gauge progress. Although we can measure performance—schools opened, wells dug—we cannot measure effects and where those effects put us on the path to an end-state. Even today, this type of benchmarking is not common, as a recent article by a British commander in Afghanistan noted: “ISAF should be measuring the success of a PRT in terms of what it had achieved for its province, not in accomplishments or milestones for the PRT itself.”75

**Poor Understanding of Power Dynamics in the Population.** Many of the failures of the stabilization strategy can be attributed to a mis-apprehension of the complexities of Afghanistan. This failure extends from the top of the bureaucratic structure to the smallest village, and accounts for why many coalition efforts produced unexpected results.

At the national level, coalition forces failed to understand the power plays between high-level players in Kabul; the divisions among technocrats, Pashtun royalists, and minority warlords; and the bargaining mechanisms between them. Overestimating the capability and stability of the national government produced the disillusionment that was compounded by a misunderstanding of the balance between center and periphery in power relations that is now well documented. Coalition forces coped by assuming greater authority and responsibil-


74 van Bijlert, “Between Discipline and Discretion,” p. 6.

ity and cutting out the Afghan government at all levels, while simultaneous¬
ously trying to build the idea of a legitimate nation-state by putting
an “Afghan face” on coalition efforts. But Afghans are acutely aware of
who really authorizes and executes the work, no matter which entity
is given credit for it. As one Afghan shura member said, “We know
the PRT people from their uniforms. If they come and visit a project
it means that the project is funded by the PRT.”76 A Kabul-based jour-
nalist added,

The PRT built a bridge in Mohammad Agha district, Logar prov-
ince and people refrained from using it until a group of religious
elders were organized to go and preach to the community that
using the bridge built by the PRT is not a sin.77

Unable to predict how Afghans would respond to any of their
efforts and unsure who was friend or foe, foreign personnel made deci-
sions about employment of force or funds based on beliefs about what
ought to work, rather than real experience. This further explains the
persistence of quick-impact development projects, despite evidence that
they failed to secure support for the legitimate government. Even today,
funding for this type of project outstrips other sources of funding.78

Similarly, coalition forces failed to correctly gauge the level of resis-
tance that they would face in the hinterland. They believed that most
Afghans saw the Taliban regime as bad, and therefore thought they
would encounter few difficulties in rooting out remaining militants.
But as a recent report of the British government concluded, “Most ana-
lysts believe that the initial UK strategy failed primarily because of a

76 Sippi Azarbajani-Moghaddam, Mirwais Wardak, Idrees Zaman, and Annabel Taylor,
research conducted for the European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan (ENNA) and the
78 Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2010. See Commander’s Emergency
Response Program (CERP) funds relative to other funds.
lack of manpower, and a poor understanding of the local situation and the level of resistance that would emerge."

**Lack of a Sustained Focus.** A third overarching cause of failure of the stabilization effort was the lack of sustained focus on Afghanistan. As described throughout this case study, officials in charge of the UN and U.S. efforts said that a more robust presence was “not necessary and not possible.” The first of these has already been dealt with in the preceding section, but the idea that resourcing the stabilization campaign was impossible referred to the lack of political will to focus on Afghanistan. The UN was already involved in Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Burundi, and the United States was already looking forward to getting Saddam Hussein out of Iraq. So the international community set in motion the establishment of an underdeveloped government in Kabul and then promptly turned its attention to other things.

**Recommended Strategy for the Future**

The first requirement for stabilization is security, and the first task in any transition will be to sustain whatever level of security has been achieved. Coalition partners, particularly the United States, have devoted considerable attention and resources to achieving an acceptable level of safety and security for the Afghan people. Of the three lines of operation, security is frequently viewed as an enabler for development and governance directives; a relatively stable security environment increases the chances that such projects can gain sufficient

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79 United Kingdom, House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, “Global Security: Afghanistan and Pakistan,” Eighth Report of Session 2008–09, July 21, 2009, p. 86. According to an expert’s view, while efforts at promoting local development upset local power balances and met with resistance, the real deficiency was not to complement the top-down effort to build national level governance capacity with a complementary effort to strengthen local, largely informal institutions. (Comment by Ambassador James Dobbins, May 2011.)


momentum. After OEF drove the Taliban and al Qaeda from their strongholds in the southern and eastern provinces, it appeared that the counterterrorism focus of operations had succeeded, but it is now clear that these initial victories were only temporary. When the Taliban returned to Afghanistan, regrouped and restocked by supporters from neighboring Pakistan, an insufficiently resourced international presence and underdeveloped indigenous security institutions yielded little for the insurgency to contend with.

At the outset, donor nations placed a great deal of emphasis on the creation of the Afghan National Security Forces, a priority that was not misplaced even if it was poorly executed upon. At present, the mechanisms for creating the army and police are fairly well developed; there are regional training centers and an increasing emphasis on mentoring and partnering. But making these forces effective will require a further increase in resources, with emphasis on ministerial-level capacity development, and a further extension of mentoring and partnership to ensure that all police and army units are capably tasked and executing operations to the best of their ability. This will require additional troops to ensure that ANSF have daily partners, not simply partners for major combat operations.

Despite its shortcomings, the ANA is increasingly viewed as a source of stability in the country and can handle some major aspects of operations. Although efforts to rehabilitate the ANP have not met with the same measure of success, a credible and capable police force is at least as important as an effective army. Consequently the same, if not greater, effort must be made to ensure ANP advancement. One possible avenue for improvement could be an effort to reform the doctrine and mission of the police to ensure that mission, training and tasking are all aligned.

At the very least, the missions of the different components of the ANSF should be better defined. There is no current rationale behind the range of operations to which the ANP is assigned; this results in an overlap with ANA directives, for which the police have not been trained or equipped. Appropriate mission statements for the ANA and ANP must be defined in order to distinguish the strategic and operational focus for each line of the country’s defense. This includes defin-
ing which forces contribute to which campaigns in what capacity—in infantry versus COIN, defensive versus offensive clearing operations, among others.

The ANP mentor system is in need of improvement. Mentoring is critical to the success of the ANP reconstitution effort because it allows trainers to build on classroom instruction and provide a more systematic basis for evaluating performance. As lead donor nation for the ANP, the United States could encourage vested interest on the part of the Afghans by developing Afghan-to-Afghan mentoring teams. Such a mechanism would offer a different approach from the current one of using an outside contractor, one that binds the indigenous police force more closely to their fellow countrymen. This would also prevent the problem of indefinite mentoring: Although the mentoring program is supposed to be term limited, in reality mentored units rarely “graduate” from that status.

The advent of new, even more local, programs such as the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF), involve applying concepts of village-based defense to problems of security. In parts of the country, the village-level citizens’ defense force is an indigenous concept and ISAF efforts to that point are likely to succeed. But rather than take from this the lesson that the APPF should be applied more broadly, we should instead derive the principle that understanding local definitions of security is key to propagating a belief of security. In some locations, the ANP may fulfill this role most closely, and in others it may be that as-yet-unknown methods should prevail.

Finally, calls for larger contributions of manpower and resources can be focused on ways to increase the chances of achieving the “clear-hold-build” objective. The current coalition basing structure does not disperse forces far enough into the parts of the country where the insurgency originated: rural areas. The United States should rethink its basing structure to increase its presence in these areas. This would likely require a reduced dependence on logistics and supply. The ANA has an opportunity to play a key role in such deployments. U.S. and

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83 Author interview, COL Thomas Staton, October 6, 2009.
coalition forces could share more bases with the ANA and transfer the majority or the entirety of the responsibility for logistics and supply to those who know the country best.

**Rethink Development.** To be successful in a development strategy, we must rethink the proposition that charitable gifts of infrastructure are a viable means to placate the population. Certain projects work but others do not, and we need to invest research into finding out why. Programs that are firmly rooted in the local context, that constructively address their impact on local power structures, that are truly Afghan—not merely with an “Afghan face”—are more likely to succeed. These programs should also be paired with a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to assess success project by project, rather than the unhelpful national-level metrics currently favored. National indicators tell us virtually nothing about the strategic-level effects of our stabilization policies.

**Understand the Population Better.** If poor understanding of the population is part of the problem, then the solution must necessarily entail developing a means to better understand the various communities of interest. Modern counterinsurgency theory and practice are predicated on gaining the support of the people for the counterinsurgency effort, yet we have a poor understanding of what the Afghan people actually need or desire.

From the American and European point of view, government institutions exist to identify and meet the needs and desires of the people. This makes it difficult for us to understand an environment that is resistant to institutions, such as Afghanistan. We have no institutional mechanism for systematically gaining an understanding of the people’s needs and desires, and our efforts to build such a mechanism have been frustrated at every turn by that very same poor understanding. This conundrum exists broadly across the security, development, and governance spheres. The tools we attempt to employ to break through this “fog of COIN,” such as public opinion surveys or key leader engagements, often say more about our own beliefs than they do about those of the Afghans. For example, after a brief introduction to the overall security section, The Asia Foundation’s most recent countrywide survey presents the results of a series of questions based on the
level of fear for one’s personal safety felt by the population. Not only does the survey not ask who the respondents are afraid of, it assumes that security itself is defined best by the frequency of fears for personal safety. But this may not be accurate. When journalist James Holland asked why villagers would support a regime that made them fear for their personal safety, he reported,

The Taliban may operate an extremely harsh sharia-based rule of law, heavily dependent on intimidation and violence, but . . . under the Taliban, a person could leave his wallet on a wall in Musa Qala and find it there two days later.

Other factors, such as the level of predictability of the environment or the provision of higher-paying jobs may be more important to the people’s sense of well-being.

So how can we understand how to ask the right questions? One possibility is to construct a phased process of social science research. Ethnography and other tools of cultural anthropology are increasingly used by the government through programs such as the Human Terrain System, but these efforts usually end with normative recommendations to service members—the advisory “angel on the shoulder.” Perhaps it would be more constructive to use ethnographic knowledge to inform later-stage data collection efforts, such as public opinion polls, to increase the accuracy of our metrics. Such a structured field research process could result in more accurate diagnosis of local attitudes.

**Maintain a Sustained Commitment.** Above all, the effort to create a durable transition from counterinsurgency to stability operations in Afghanistan rests on the sustained commitment of U.S. and coalition forces. Rather than indulge in the strategic narcolepsy that has defined U.S. intervention in Afghanistan for the past 30 years, we must exhibit a sustained interest in that country’s future. The depth of Afghani-

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86 Author interview, Andrea Jackson, October 13, 2009.
Afghanistan's instability demonstrated in this case study will require significant presence, resources, and attention at the strategic and policy level to remediate. If there is a key lesson to be gleaned from both the U.S. experience in Afghanistan during the time of the Soviet invasion and the “false dawn” of the immediate rout of the Taliban in 2002, it is that losing interest in Afghanistan before the transition to stability has been solidly achieved creates unpredictable and dangerous results.

In summary, it can be said that the situation in Afghanistan is, as of this writing, still in the counterinsurgency stage, and that a transition to protracted stability has not yet taken place. Indeed, as we pointed out earlier in the chapter, the “transition” that took place in Afghanistan was the move from early stability efforts toward COIN, which is the phase that is still under way today. The suggested shifts in U.S. and Afghan government policy listed above could contribute to an eventual move back toward stability.