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Serious problems in Afghanistan demand a "re-set" of the international effort to reverse the decline and set a new trajectory. The central component of success required in this fragmented endeavor is the re-assertion of American leadership of our friends and allies. This discussion focuses upon understanding U.S. goals, defining our core objectives, identifying first principles for success, and depicting a phased approach to a military strategy. It also briefly speaks to issues with Pakistan and Afghanistan. This paper reflects significant collaboration and discussion with David Kilcullen, counter-insurgency expert and former Australian Army officer. However, the opinions expressed here are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect either those of Dr. Kilcullen or those of the Department of Defense.

Introduction

The international endeavor in Afghanistan at the beginning of 2009 is drifting toward failure. There is still time to turn it around, but this will take strong U.S. leadership, a change of strategic direction and a focused and substantial effort. Results will not come from continuing "business as usual" or simply adding more resources. Major change is essential.

Eight years into a broad and substantial multi-national investment and two years since NATO assumed military leadership, the Taliban have returned in growing strength, poor governance and corruption are widespread, the

Afghan people's confidence is ebbing, and the political sustainability of NATO's effort over the long term is in question. An increasingly fractured international civil effort is mirrored by a fragmented NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) military organization with 41 members – all of whom operate under differing rules and a myriad of national strategies and caveats. Fundamental questions remain for both the international and U.S. effort: Who is in charge? What is the plan? What does success look like? Today, U.S. and international goals and objectives are unclear at best. Success is possible, but only if dramatic changes are applied – and applied rapidly. 2009 will be a decisive year in Afghanistan – for the international community, for the Afghan people, and for the Taliban.

Defining our goals

Any discussion of reversing a downward trajectory in Afghanistan must start with a discussion of objectives. What is "winning?" Can we "win?" And even the most fundamental question: who is "we?" Different actors in the Afghan campaign have disparate interests and objectives, a reality often poorly appreciated. The goals of the Afghan government may not be synonymous with those of the international community. The goals of NATO members and the alliance writ large may not be identical to those of the United States. The goals of the diverse civil players in Afghanistan – Afghan and international –may not align well with those of the military forces fighting what most

would describe as a deadly counter-insurgency (COIN) fight – a full-fledged war.

While each of these groups has its own set of discrete objectives, this paper will focus on the challenges from an American perspective. **Bottom line up front: Success in Afghanistan will require a re-assertion of American leadership.** While such leadership must be exercised through close and genuine partnership with our friends and allies wherever possible, the past three years of decline have amply demonstrated that lack of full American attention and an over-reliance on other actors and international institutions as substitute for strong U.S. leadership will ultimately fall short.

Core Objectives

"Winning" for the U.S. in this context equates to achieving American policy objectives in Afghanistan and in the region. Those objectives can be outlined as follows:

• The Taliban and Al Qaeda defeated in the region and denied usable sanctuary; further attacks on the United States or allies avoided.

• Pakistan stabilized as a long term partner that is economically viable, friendly to the United States, no longer an active base for international terrorism and in control of its nuclear weapons.

• NATO success: the trans-atlantic alliance preserved with NATO's role in Afghanistan recast into a politically sustainable set of objectives.

• A stable, sustainable Afghan government that is legitimate in the eyes of the Afghan people, capable of exercising effective governance and in control of its territory.

• Regional states confident of US staying power and commitment as their partner in the multi-faceted regional struggle against violent extremism.

• The United States' regional circle of friends expanded, and the influence of enemies (e.g., violent extremists) diminished.

In order to accomplish these objectives, the U.S. must work closely with a myriad of partners – first and foremost, the Afghan government, but also the governments of allies, friends and neighbors who comprise both the international military and civil efforts. Additional stakeholders include a diverse set of actors from non-governmental organizations, private entities and international institutions such as United Nations and its many agencies.

None of this is new – what is new, however is the growing recognition that this diverse mix of sometimes fractious players cannot effectively counter an increasingly powerful enemy without strong U.S. leadership. Of the myriad of

actors involved, only the United States can provide the leadership "engine" required for the multi-faceted international to succeed in Afghanistan: it alone possesses the resources, regional influence and combat capabilities to act as lead nation -- from facing the growing military threat to the provision of "*in-conflict*" (versus "post-conflict") reconstruction and development efforts. The United States recognizes that it has vital interests at stake in Afghanistan and the region; many other nations view their vital interests in Afghanistan as simply preserving their relationship with the United States.

Success: Leadership plus Strategy plus Resources

Put as a mathematical equation, success – meeting the above U.S. policy objectives – derives from the balanced combination of leadership, strategy and resources. Our system distorts our focus toward the resource component: generating more troops, more dollars and euros, more aid workers and police mentors absorbs vast amounts of our energy. But resources cannot be a substitute for the lack of a plan -- nor can they take the place of the most central ingredient: the dynamic leadership necessary to deliver success.

Missing during the past three years of de facto NATO primacy was an effective American leadership "engine" to unify and drive the international effort in Afghanistan toward a singular set of objectives and strategy. Beginning in 2005, the U.S. largely approached the military handoff of the Afghan conflict to NATO as a "divestiture" opportunity

– NATO would take charge of Afghanistan, demonstrate the alliance's relevance in the 21st Century, and free the U.S. to focus on the immense challenges in Iraq. At the U.S. Embassy, an integrated U.S. civil-military enterprise in 2005 shifted toward a separate civil approach with the dissolution of the overall US military headquarters in Kabul and the arrival of NATO as the over-arching military command.

Unfortunately, despite a new American commander leading NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for the first time, the conflict rapidly became decentralized in application – much different from previous US-led NATO missions (such as the 1995 Balkans "IFOR" effort or 1999 Kosovo Air War). This individualistic approach with contributing nations effectively designing their own campaigns has proven proved problematic. The past two years of NATO command in Afghanistan have exposed numerous flaws in alliance inter-operability and seen a spike to unprecedented levels of insecurity and both military and civilian casualties – violence today is up 543% on 2005, according to United Nations figures, a rise of several orders of magnitude over the previous five years. 2007's high point of violent incidents became 2008's year's lowest point.

In the military dimension, 2005 levels of U.S. and coalition unity of command has largely been replaced by loosely coordinated NATO national efforts focused on the small slices of Afghanistan, semi-autonomous from any unified military strategy on the ground – and in some regions

simply providing a purely peace-keeping (and often symbolic) military presence. NATO has spoken of a "comprehensive approach" in its operations, but confusion regarding NATO's historic role as a conventional military alliance have preempted it from taking greater ownership of integration of military and civil effects in this irregular war where success requires the effective integration of both. Many NATO nations remain profoundly uncomfortable characterizing the effort in Afghanistan as a "war" at all -- despite rocket attacks, roadside bombs, ambushes and thousands of casualties on all sides. In the civil sphere, the UN mission has broadly lacked the will and until recently, the mandate to unify the civil sector, and still avoids the notion of somehow "joining up" with a military organization and strategy. In sum, the current approach has proven a recipe for deterioration and potential failure.

Resources poured into a disjointed strategy with fragmented leadership produce stalemate – the description often applied to the current situation in Afghanistan. And stalemate, in a counterinsurgency, represents a win for the insurgent.

Lack of continuity and coherence in our leadership and our strategy removes any possibility of delivering effective results without a major change of approach. Over the last eight years, our standard response to challenges in Afghanistan has always focused on more resources; at the same time we have cycled through at least six different US military commanders, seven NATO ISAF commanders, six

different US embassy leaders, and four chiefs of the UN Mission.

The number of diverse "strategies" has closely paralleled this revolving door of senior leadership. In this extraordinarily complex conflict, strategy is important (and will be explored below), but leadership is vital – leadership that includes both organizational structures (e.g., military commands) and people: the human beings who will fill critical roles in the effort, from senior NATO military commander to US ambassador.

First Principles

Achieving success in Afghanistan requires the international community – led by the United States – to focus on three "first principles" in order to create the conditions for a new approach. These principles must be the touchstones of any new strategy and provide a lens through which any set of decisions should be viewed. Absent these principles, no new strategies, no infusion of troops and money, and no increased in international support will prove effective.

First, ***the Afghan people are the center of gravity*** of all efforts. This fundamental understanding must underpin and influence every aspect of a new approach in Afghanistan. Securing the population entails more than simply protection from the Taliban: success requires the Afghan people to have confidence in their personal security, health and education, access to resources, governance and economic future – a broad "human security" portfolio. The Afghan

people, down to the local level, are the ultimate arbiters of success in Afghanistan. Progress rather than perfection is a standard they understand and will accept. On the other hand, international civil and military activities that alienate the Afghan people, offend their cultural sensibilities, or further separate them from their government are doomed to fail. Nurturing the reasonable hope and cautious optimism of the Afghan people in a better future is the *sine qua non* of our collective success in Afghanistan.

Second, ***creating actual unity of effort*** within the civil and military spheres is essential -- and ultimately integrating the two. Countless dollars and tens of thousands of troops have been committed to Afghanistan over the past eight years, but a sober assessment would conclude that the whole has totaled far less than the sum of the parts. The enemy seeks to disrupt our unity of effort; we have given him many of the tools to do so. Only by dramatically improving the coherence of the military effort and by connecting it to the civil reconstruction, governance and development effort will effective progress be made. A "comprehensive approach" wherein each nation designs its own national approach ensures disunity of effects.

The civil dimension of the enterprise has been even more fragmented than the disjointed military effort. Successful Afghan government programs such as the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS), the Independent Directorate of Local Government (IDLG) and the National Solidarity Program (NSP) should form the drivers of this integrated effort – and serve as the nexus of an integrated

civil-military plan. Only the United States has the capacity to lead this integrated effort – and it should exercise its leadership by fully supporting and enabling the Afghan government, allowing allies and the international community to solidify behind an Afghan plan, with an Afghan face, built on Afghan institutions with improved capacity and effectiveness.

Third, ***simultaneous bottom-up and top-down action*** is required. The recurrent debate between strengthening the central government versus strengthening capacity at the local level must be ended. Afghanistan requires both a capable national government in Kabul and effective, legitimate local institutions at province, district and village level. Models for this relationship exist in Afghan history over the centuries, most recently in the 1960s and early 1970s. Action in this realm must be two-pronged: Kabul and the central government as the "top-down" focus of the Kabul-based international community; and province and district level "bottoms-up" action, enabled (and sometimes led) by military efforts.

Improvements in central government from the capital must become the main task for the Kabul-based international community, with institution-building efforts jointly led by the United States, key allies, and UNAMA: effective local government will be difficult if the national institutions of power remain broken. These efforts should be focused toward key ministries of the Afghan government, which directly impact the local population, as well as on support for a more effective executive system around the president.

At the same time, a renewed effort must be made to concentrate resources and direct assistance at the growth of local governance capabilities and sustainable state and societal institutions at the province and district level.

In the south and east, because of the poor security environment, much of this effort must be led by military forces with civil actors in support – a different scenario from the north, where much better security permits civil-led efforts. As security improves (akin to the north and west), the primacy of military versus civil roles can be reversed. As in Iraq, improvements in security are an essential first step that will prompt faster progress in governance and development programs, which will in turn enable greater security, leading ultimately to a virtuous cycle of improving conditions. Moreover, focused international attention in Kabul can do much to provide increased resources for provinces and districts, as well as to enforce accountability – while adhering to the "first, do no harm" commandment in influencing local matters.

With the foundation provided by these first principles, an approach for the next several years can be outlined.

Operational Sequencing

The broad outline of a new strategy in Afghanistan translates into an operational sequence of reducing the threat while securing the population, simultaneously building up the capacity and legitimacy of the Afghan government at the central and local level, then transitioning

each category of effect to sole Afghan control once a sustainable Afghan capability is achieved.

This is a classic counter-insurgency strategy for Afghanistan – but a unified strategy as opposed to the multiple disjointed approaches that exist today. Due to the protracted nature of counterinsurgency, the severe lack of development and infrastructure in the region, and the intractable nature of regional dynamics affecting the conflict (such as the India-Pakistan confrontation) this strategy is a long-term enterprise that may take 10 to 15 years of effort to deliver decisive and enduring results.

However, assuming the international community allocates adequate resources and chooses sound security objectives, enough progress might be made to allow significant reductions in coalition combat troops well before this time, based on conditions on the ground rather than a rigid timeline.

But executing a strategy focused on the long-term in Afghanistan is currently not feasible, due to the current dangers that are the result of the decay of government legitimacy and a deteriorating security situation on the ground. So before we can begin executing a long-term strategy the United States and the international community must first halt the deterioration, stabilize the situation, and regain the initiative. Only the United States can lead this effort, and only through a military-led action in its first phases.

Therefore, at the operational level, the level at which strategy is implemented through campaigns and civilian programs on the ground, the sequence of action is ***"Stabilize, Protect, Build, Transition."*** This can be summarized as follows:

2009 – Stabilize Phase (Holding Operation): Focus a surge of US and Afghan forces, and additional combat forces from other partners willing to contribute, on the central essential task of protecting the population during the August 2009 elections and on stabilizing the security situation. The election outcome will be a key test of legitimacy of the Afghan government, and indirectly, the international effort. A successful election outcome – one that meets international standards of fairness and transparency and strengthens Afghan institutions – offers the chance to hit the political re-set button, restoring the legitimacy of the Afghan government and with it the credibility of the international effort.

2010 – Protect / Regain the Initiative Phase (Counter-offensive): continue to protect the population and state institutions while persuading, enabling and mentoring the Afghan government to govern more effectively – top-down and bottom-up. This will entail substantial growth in security forces: US, allied, Afghan Army and Police.

2010-2015- Building Success Phase (Consolidation): – protect the population, build Afghan state and non-state institutions. Improved security built from the bottom up

around the country provides space for concurrent growth of key economic and governance functions. Success in the security sphere incentivizes reconciliation efforts. Begin selective transition (Afghanization) in the north and west.

2015-2025 – Transition / Movement to Afghan Control: continue selective transition -- as further geographical areas (provinces/regions) or functional aspects (e.g. agriculture, local government, customs and border protection, policing) of the state achieve sustainable stability, hand-off control over them to responsible Afghan institutions. International military presence draws down.

Continuous – Prevent (Counter-Sanctuary Operations) Throughout the operational sequence above, the "prevent" task is concurrent, continuous, and (because it disrupts other tasks) is conducted only to the limited level needed to prevent another international terrorist attack on the scale of the 9/11 attacks. Tactical opportunities which undermine broader strategic goals are avoided.

Political Strategy

Although providing a detailed political strategy is outside of the scope of this piece, a short synopsis of the complementary political approach is provided here. The underpinning political strategy is to regain the initiative through a sustained surge of international military efforts partnered with improved local civil functions while generating increased leverage over the Afghan government,

aimed at reversing its loss of legitimacy through the circuit-breaker of successful 2009 elections. This increased leverage is then used, via persuasive, enabling and coercive measures ("carrot and stick"), to create a reformed Afghan government that governs in a more effective and credible manner (building on its own improved legitimacy through the 2009-10 elections process, ideally including district elections promised in 2002 but not scheduled so far).

As part of this overall political approach, the negotiation and reconciliation strategy is aimed at identifying and co-opting reconcilable elements of the loose insurgent confederation, while simultaneously targeting and eliminating the tiny minority of irreconcilables. Strength matters in this effort: regaining the psychological initiative by creating military success accelerates the potential for breakdown of Taliban fighters and promotes reconciliation – insurgents with no hope for a future are much more likely to lay down their weapons than those who believe they are winning. Conversely, pursuing negotiations while your adversary perceives he is winning negates any prospects for success.

The Military Strategy

An effective military strategy is paramount in an environment where all agree that lack of security prevents progress across all other elements of power. Despite the role of the enemy – Taliban and affiliated networks – in creating this dangerous security environment, coalition

military forces must avoid the temptation to focus upon the enemy as the centerpiece of their actions to restore security: the population must remain the center of gravity. Focusing on the enemy risks endlessly chasing an elusive actor who has no fixed locations he must defend, and can thus melt away at will. It also creates civilian casualties, undermining popular support for the effort, as the enemy hides behind the population and deliberately provokes casualties.

North vs South: Stability and Counter-Insurgency Approaches

Geographically, Afghanistan can be broadly divided into two security zones: the relatively more secure northern part of the country (the "Stability Zone") and the dangerous and unstable south (the "Counter-Insurgency Zone"). A military strategy for Afghanistan must recognize this disparity and of necessity focus its finite resources and planning upon the south. The Stability Zone (comprising Regional Command - North based in Mazar e Sharif and Regional Command - West based in Herat) presently demands few military forces: Afghan National Army units stationed there are largely underemployed (while currently unavailable to rotate to the south). NATO forces in the north perform a traditional peace-keeping and reconstruction role – offering a useful security presence but making little direct contribution to stabilizing the much more dangerous south. That said, pockets of Taliban influence are growing in Pashtun areas across the north, and NATO military forces assigned to these areas must be prepared to counter this increasing threat.

The Counter-Insurgency (COIN) Zone – the primary area of insecurity and combat action – comprises RC-East based in Bagram and RC-South in Kandahar. Forces in the COIN Zone are engaged in near-continuous combat action and account for the bulk of casualties in both NATO ISAF and in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) -- U.S. counterterrorism forces not under NATO command. Enemy suicide attacks, ambushes, roadside bombs and popular intimidation occur predominantly in the COIN Zone.

Population Security: Military Lead

A population-centric strategy focused upon the COIN Zone should be based upon classic counter-insurgency theory, modified and tailored so that it applies to the specific circumstances of the Afghan context. Owing to the very dangerous security environment in the COIN Zone, *military commanders must take the lead in the civil-military effort*. Military civil affairs units joined by a select number of appropriately trained and equipped civilian volunteers, with adequate legal authorities, will focus on improving the accountability and performance of Afghan provincial and district governance, catalyzing economic development and improving the rule of law. Civilian volunteers will often be at the same levels of risk as the military units with whom they are partnered – which reinforces the need for military-led efforts with “combat” reconstruction and development capabilities.

As increased (mostly American) units flow into the COIN Zone – perhaps as many as 30,000 more in 2009 alone – both combat actions and casualties will increase as more contacts between Taliban and coalition forces ensue. For this reason, the level of violence involving the coalition will be a poor metric for success in 2009 – regardless of whether we are winning or losing, the level of incidents will rise sharply. Rather, the key success metrics will be control over population centers and Afghan-on-Afghan violence.

Military commanders in the south and east must position their forces to control and protect major population centers (cities, towns and larger villages) while ensuring freedom of access along key routes of communication. Areas that cannot be protected using coalition troops must be secured by the presence of special forces and advisory teams, working with local government and Afghan forces at the district level to raise and employ local security volunteers (in the nature of a neighborhood watch) and supported by quick-reaction forces in nearby major centers. This role should become the primary focus of special forces – much different from their principal "door-kicking" mission of today.

Inherent in providing security to population centers is a robust parallel effort to improve governance and extend development and reconstruction across key sectors. The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) concept has proven useful in this contested environment and should be expanded to district level through the fielding of District

Reconstruction Detachments and Governance Transition Teams. Deploying PRTs down to district level will provide an implementing reality to the "bottom-up" approach and complement "top-down' reform in Kabul. In broad terms, civil-military integration and unity of effort in Kabul argues for a *diplomatic-led, centralized approach*; civil-military integration in the contested space across the COIN Zone argues for a *military-led, decentralized effort* until security can be returned to a more normal level (e.g., northern Afghanistan: the Stability Zone).

Area Ownership: Delivering Results

Military combat units in the COIN Zone must operate within a principle of "area ownership" where unit commanders "own" the primary responsibility for entire segments of territory -- districts and even provinces -- and lead a unified civil, military and Afghan government effort to ensure coherent, mutually supportive results within these areas. "Area Ownership" is a derivative of the New York City Police precinct approach of the 1990s, where precinct captains were held fully accountable for crime in their precinct – but were given all the tools and support to change the picture; this one person owning all resources and all outcomes is absent in today's approach and contributes to both fragmentation of effort and lack of accountability for results.

The new approach should be visibly Afghan-led and connected to the Afghan National Development Strategy goals, but coalition military forces have an essential

behind-the-scenes role to play: “leadership from the rear.” Only by integrating all of these civil-military efforts under one commander will synergy and effectiveness be achieved. The coalition military commander must be partnered with his Afghan National Army counterpart and the local Afghan governmental leader – be it provincial governor or district administrator. The disjointed approaches employed to date --- dividing military and civil (and even Afghan) enterprises in the face of a resurgent enemy -- have taken us to the point of failure. It is past time to make the bold shift required in order to assure success.

From Mentoring to Partnership

An essential shift in operational technique is also needed, away from today’s mentoring-only approach (where small teams military personnel organized as Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams or Embedded Training Teams are responsible to advise entire Afghan units) towards an approach that complements these teams by partnering entire Afghan military and police units with coalition counterparts.

At present, because of the security situation, our often under-manned coalition advisor teams can only be in a limited number of places and find it extremely difficult to observe and monitor the activity of their dispersed Afghan unit. Police and military units tend to operate on their own, with only limited coordination with each other and with coalition forces.

By contrast, experience in Iraq and in parts of Afghanistan (such as Regional Command East) where a partnering model has been used, suggests that partnering whole units in such a way that any patrol or operation, regardless of size, always includes a coalition military, Afghan military and Afghan police component (and ideally also an Afghan civil governance component), improves the performance of all three elements.

Coalition forces' performance improves because, since they always work closely with an Afghan partner unit, their level of local knowledge, language skill and situational awareness improves dramatically. This creates fewer civilian casualties than occur during unilateral operations, and allows for a subtler and less disruptive approach to the local population.

Afghan military units' performance improves, because they have a constant example and model of correct operational technique and appropriate military behavior constantly before their eyes, and because of the indirect fire, intelligence support, transportation and other enablers available to them through coalition forces.

Afghan police effectiveness improves because they are supported by military partners in the execution of law and order functions (rather than, as now, carrying alone the burden of counterinsurgency operations for which they are ill-trained and poorly equipped) and because the level of police corruption and abuse drops dramatically when

coalition and Afghan military forces are present to independently monitor police behavior. Meanwhile the presence of police officers creates another whole category of ways to respond to security incidents, allowing arrest or questioning, instead of leaving military forces to respond with potentially lethal force.

This approach complements, but does not replace, the existing coalition advisory teams that perform an essential and irreplaceable function as "up close and personal" daily mentors to Afghan police and military leaders. It provides them with much greater scope to monitor, advise and assist their supported unit, since they are able to be in many places at once and can draw on greater coalition resources. These mentoring teams must be fully resourced immediately in order to deliver their full potential in an environment where their role becomes more vital every day.

Enhancing Command and Control: Military Unity of Effort

Military forces too must be organized in ways to optimize rather than degrade their effectiveness in a fight for which there will never be adequate resources. Unity of effort between civil and military leadership cited above is one dimension. Equally important is the need to streamline and align the NATO and US military commands to achieve maximum results. The NATO headquarters in Kabul today performs too many functions to be effective: *de facto*, it operates at the political-military, strategic, operational and

tactical levels – a span of control and responsibility which violates military doctrine and which has proved largely ineffective. Serving all tasks allows it to perform none well. Division of responsibilities is overdue: a three-star US headquarters whose commander is dual-hatted as a NATO deputy commander should be positioned at Kandahar and given the day-to-day counter-insurgency fight across the COIN Zone.

The COIN Zone 3-star HQ should have selected multi-national composition, but only with long-serving staff members of at least 12 months tour duration. Its "battlespace" or assigned territory should include all of RC-South and RC-East, and both of those two-star RC divisional-level commanders should report to the three-star Commander of the COIN Zone.

In a much-needed change from today, the COIN Zone commander should have full command and control of all military forces operating in his domain; his U.S. command authority makes that possible. This should explicitly include Special Forces of all types and all Afghan National Army Embedded Training Teams (ETT) and OMLTs. Moreover, the COIN Zone commander should create a unified headquarters that fully includes ANA command and control capabilities into this single fight across southern Afghanistan--a missing component today.

The COIN Zone commander should be assigned a multi-national senior civil staff to facilitate the integration of the civil and military efforts across his zone. This civilian staff

(and their counterparts at lower level) would not fall under the military command but would serve in what the military calls a “supporting-supported” role to the commander: he is “supported” by their efforts and they are “supporting” his. This arrangement parallels the *de facto* approach in US PRTs today. At day’s end however, the military commander is held to account for the integrated outcome of this fused effort across his battlespace; the same holds true for each of his subordinate commanders, each of whom should be assigned a similar small civil staff to oversee and integrate civilian efforts across their discrete areas of operation. The Embedded PRTs (EPRTs) employed with excellent effect in Iraq during the surge could serve as a useful model here.

Of key importance, these commanders and their civil-military staffs must connect as equal partners with parallel Afghan governmental and military leaders unified by oversight – “ownership” -- of the same areas. This much different approach to unity of effort is a leap ahead from today’s independent “stovepipes” of national and agency approaches; these often extend down to provinces from Kabul or even national capitols abroad with little regard for unified effect. Again, this military-led, civilian supported approach is only designed for high threat areas (i.e., the COIN Zone) and will revert to a more traditional civilian-led model once security is significantly improved.

Continuity: Building Equity in the Outcome

Finally, the new strategy for the COIN Zone (Regional Commands South and East) must be co-developed by the military commander and his civil-military staff who will implement and be held accountable for the strategy's results. Area ownership also implies buy-in by those carrying out the mission, and vests great authority in subordinate commanders to modify the strategy as facts on the ground change. Arguably, these commanders and their headquarters in a sustained counter-insurgency campaign should anchor themselves in their areas for prolonged periods – the senior-most leaders for upwards of two years between rotations – to improve continuity and develop a "long view" beyond today's short term focus.

The time is also ripe for the U.S. to re-examine its combat headquarters assignments to Afghanistan to either "plant the flag" of two divisional and one corps-level HQ to finish the fight (possibly on an individual rotation model); or to specialize perhaps three or four designated divisions with Afghanistan expertise and align them for all future rotations. To date, the U.S. Army has rotated five different 2-star divisional level HQ through Afghanistan in seven years, with yet a sixth new HQ arrival pending. Successful counter-insurgencies require relationship-building, deep cultural knowledge, and sustained focus – as commanders in Regional Command East have demonstrated, continuity is, in itself, an extremely important operational effect. Now is the time to reset this equation for the long haul.

Pakistan

Although describing a strategic approach to Pakistan is beyond the scope of this piece, ignoring the linkage between Afghanistan and Pakistan would be irresponsible.

Pakistan arguably presents the Unites States with its greatest strategic challenge in the region. The second largest Islamic country in the world armed with several dozen nuclear weapons demands our attention. That said, the conflict in Afghanistan is not simply a subset of a broader set of challenges in Pakistan. "Solving" Pakistan would not in and of itself "solve" Afghanistan. Afghan problems are as much internally driven (crime, corruption, narcotics; lack of governance, infrastructure, economics) as they are any result of the insurgents who operate from sanctuary in Pakistani border areas. Solving these internal problems requires creating the right conditions of security, but equally important requires adopting an effective development, economic and governance approach within Afghanistan itself.

Pakistan requires its own strategy and its own solutions as the U.S. assesses its requirements in the region. The U.S. must assist Pakistan in managing change – economically, militarily, perhaps even societally – as it deals with immense problems brought about by a deadly combination of both internal and external factors. The U.S. must partner with the Pakistani government to develop a vision of a

long-term strategic partnership between Pakistan and United States – not one simply based upon today's transactional relationship anchored in fighting terrorists in the tribal areas. Much like the U.S. has evolved the idea of a long-term strategic partnership with India, commensurate effort must be invested into a parallel track with Pakistan – but not as a zero sum game.

As to Pakistan's relationship to the conflict in Afghanistan, U.S. success in reversing the decline in Afghanistan and achieving success would increase our leverage with Pakistan. Arguably, much of the schizophrenic Pakistani approach to the Afghan conflict today is based upon their expectation that the U.S. and our allies lack staying power -- and will move rapidly for the exits if failure is imminent. Success in Afghanistan might reverse that perception and lend much greater credibility to U.S. statements of long-term commitment.

Conclusion

The international effort in Afghanistan is at a difficult and dangerous crossroads. A serious decline in security is mirrored by lack of good governance and a burgeoning illegal economy, fueling corruption at all levels. The population – buffeted by a series of downturns after the high hopes of mid-decade, are beginning to question both their own government and the presence of foreign forces – especially in light of civilian casualties and some offending tactics. Hope for a better future is diminishing – a clear danger signal. Without substantial and dramatic changes to

our approach – leadership, strategy and resources – the risk of failure is great.

Losing in Afghanistan after more than eight years of major international effort creates potentially horrific results: an insecure Pakistan; a return to deep sanctuary for Al Qaeda; increased regional instability across south and central Asia; a lack of confidence in American staying power and military prowess; and a fragmentation of NATO and the transatlantic alliance. Failure truly is not an option.

The arrival of the new U.S. Administration is exactly the right moment to revisit our collective objectives in Afghanistan; to re-animate NATO's involvement; to regenerate resource commitments; and to re-assert U.S. leadership -- which more than any other single external factor is vital to success.

The war in Afghanistan can be won, but only through the concentrated application of strong leadership, beginning in Washington; a new, unified civil-military strategy, which must be implemented from the bottom-up on the ground; and the right mix of resources to enable a new set of dynamic leaders to fully implement the new plan. But we must clearly acknowledge that only the United States can be the engine that powers this train, and the only nation that can lead this renewed international effort.

The next several years will demand an increased military effort – indeed, the dangerous security situation across much of the country will require a military lead to enable

the delivery of many civil effects. But ultimately, the war must be won by the Afghan people and their government. The role of the international community, while vital, simply creates the conditions – space, time, human capacity – to allow the Afghan people to prevail. But only a renewed approach which delivers focused U.S. leadership to an endeavor which is today is so clearly off-track can reverse the trend lines and set the stage for enduring success. This is eminently within our reach to achieve.

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