What will Afghanistan look like following the final U.S. withdrawal in 2014?

STRATEGIKA

CONFLICTS OF THE PAST AS LESSONS FOR THE PRESENT

From the Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict at the Hoover Institution
Image: Poster Collection, INT 503, Hoover Institution Archives

Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of "War, Revolution, and Peace." Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: "The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man's endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life." From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the "Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict" has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution's dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

Strategika

Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.

Editorial Board

Contributing Members

STRATEGIKA

CONFLICTS OF THE PAST AS LESSONS FOR THE PRESENT

March 2014 | Issue 12

THE HOOVER INSTITUTION
Stanford University

Contents

STRATEGIKA · March 2014 · Issue 12

BACKGROUND ESSAY

FEATURED COMMENTARY

RELATED COMMENTARY

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Afghanistan—Graveyard of Empires?

By Max Boot

Afghanistan long ago became known as the "graveyard of empires." But while it is undoubtedly a tough place to fight and a tough place to control, its reputation is vastly overblown. In fact the last two empires to try to dominate Afghanistan—the British and Soviet—largely succeeded in achieving their objectives even after pulling their troops out as long as they were willing to keep extending aid to Kabul.

The British encounter with Afghanistan is remembered primarily for the disaster of the First Afghan War (1839-1842) which culminated in a pell-mell retreat by Anglo-Indian troops and their camp followers from Kabul. Almost the entire force of 16,000 people, including 700 Europeans, was wiped out as a result of freezing winter temperatures and unrelenting attacks by hostile tribesmen. The British encountered further setbacks during the Second Afghan War (1878-1880), most notably defeat at the Battle of Maiwand in southern Afghanistan, when nearly 1,000 soldiers out of a force of 2,500 were wiped out.

Yet London managed to achieve its essential objective in Afghanistan: to keep control of Kabul's foreign policy and to keep Russian influence out. From 1880 to 1919 Afghanistan was a virtual protectorate of the British Empire, with the British supporting the rule of Abdur Rahman, "the Iron Emir," and his son Habibullah. Habibullah's assassination in 1919 brought to the throne his brother Amanullah, who launched the Third Afghan War to regain control of his country's foreign policy. He succeeded but only because the British were too war-weary to offer much resistance. In any case Russia, at that point in the throes of a civil war between Whites and Reds, appeared to pose little threat of trumping British influence in Afghanistan.

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, which began over Christmas 1979 and ended in early 1989, suffered even more setbacks than the British did during their three Afghanistan wars. Moscow would lose 26,000 Red Army soldiers in battles against the mujahideen, who had the formidable advantages of enjoying cross-border sanctuary in Pakistan and external sources of arms from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, among others. Yet the Soviet-backed Najibullah regime survived the pullout of the Red Army. Najibullah would continue to rule until 1992, by which time the Soviet Union had dissolved and its subsidies to Kabul had ended. At that point Najibullah was finally toppled by two tribal militias—Ahmad Shah Massoud's Tajiks and Abdul Rashid Dostum's Uzbeks. But between 1989 and 1992 Moscow had finally achieved, however briefly, its essential objectives in Afghanistan by supporting a friendly government in Kabul.

Will it be possible for the U.S. to repeat the example of the British and Russians and keep a friendly regime in power in Kabul while withdrawing most of its own troops by the end of this year? To answer that question requires a brief review of Afghanistan's history since 2001.

The Taliban fell with surprising ease in the months after 9/11. They were toppled by the Northern Alliance assisted by American aircraft and a small number of American intelligence officers and Special Operations soldiers, because their barbarism had cost them the support of the population. At the end of 2001, a new government was cobbled together by outside powers led by an urbane, English-speaking exile named Hamid Karzai.

Karzai, however, exercised little real influence at first. Effective power devolved to brutal warlords such as Sher Mohammad Abkundzada, Muhammad Fahim Khan, Ismail Khan, Gul Agha Sherzai, and Karzai's own half brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai. The problem was that, when these men had last ruled Afghanistan in the early 1990s, following the overthrow of Najibullah,

Poster Collection, INT 503,
Hoover Institution Archives

the situation had been so corrupt and chaotic that many Afghans had welcomed the Taliban as a more humane alternative. Karzai knew this and he sought in vain to curb the warlords' influence. He failed because the warlords had more armed men than he had. The U.S. and its coalition allies put little effort into building up Afghan security forces. There were a total of just 6,000 soldiers and police at the end of 2002 and fewer than 100,000 at the beginning of 2007—clearly insufficient to control a country of 30 million people. Nor did the U.S. and its allies send their own forces to fill the resulting power vacuum. As late as 2006 there were only 30,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, and their mission was primarily limited to chasing remnants of al-Qaeda.

Karzai asked for American military help to limit the warlords' power. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld refused, telling him to do things the "Chicago way": "My point was that instead of giving Karzai the freedom to throw around the weight of the U.S. military," Rumsfeld explained in his memoir, "he should learn to use patronage … to get the local Afghan warlords, governors, and cabinet officials in line." Karzai learned this lesson all too well. He soon formed a symbiotic relationship with the warlords: They kept him in power and in return he turned a blind eye to their thievery and graft, which included everything from producing illicit narcotics to appropriating government land for themselves.

Meanwhile, the Taliban, who had been flat on their backs in 2002-2005, regenerated themselves in Pakistan sanctuaries with the tacit permission and probable assistance of Pakistan's Inter-

Services Intelligence Agency. By 2006 they reemerged to present once again a growing threat. Many rural Pashtuns in southern and eastern Afghanistan were receptive to their return because they were so fed up with the corruption and ineffectiveness of the American-supported government.

The U.S. military was not able to respond adequately to the growth of the Taliban because it was so committed to the war in Iraq. Only after the success of the Iraq surge in 2007-2008 could Washington begin to surge forces into Afghanistan. Under President Obama, who called Afghanistan the "necessary war" to distinguish it from Iraq, troop levels tripled to 100,000 American personnel in 2010. Yet that was still not as many troops as commanders on the ground wanted, and along with the decision to send more troops Obama also announced an 18-month timeline on their deployment, which encouraged the Taliban to simply wait them out.

The limited size and duration of the surge made it impossible to conduct clear-and-hold counterinsurgency operations across the entire country. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the NATO commander from 2009 to 2010, limited the scope of his clear-and-hold operations to the Taliban hotbeds of southern Afghanistan. Here the troop-surge had a palpable impact, with the Taliban losing control of most of Helmand and Kandahar provinces by the end of 2011. The surge also enabled a renewed effort to train and equip the Afghan National Security Forces. Their size increased to 350,000 (roughly evenly split between army and police), and their effectiveness grew exponentially. Afghan forces have taken the lead in 95% of all military operations and they are suffering at least 95% of all coalition casualties.

Yet the Taliban remained very much undefeated. They still had safe havens in Pakistan and, more worrisome, they still enjoyed relative freedom of maneuver only a few hours' drive from

Kabul. McChrystal had planned to shift troops to the east after the south was secure, but by that time it was too late—President Obama was determined to draw down the force whether it made military sense or not.

So today the US is preparing to leave Afghanistan while the Taliban still pose a major threat—but with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) increasingly capable of defending their own country. Afghanistan is likely to remain impoverished and corrupt, but it is not necessarily destined to once again become a terrorist safe haven. The Afghan security forces can safeguard their country from a Taliban takeover, but only if they continue to receive assistance from the U.S. in such vital areas as intelligence, logistics, planning, and air support. U.S. commanders estimate the total cost of aid to the ANSF at $4 billion to $5 billion a year, and they believe that an absolute minimum of 10,000 U.S. troops will need to remain behind as advisers and as a high-end counterterrorism force. A greater commitment of money and personnel would further increase the odds of success—but that seems unlikely given President Obama's rapidly waning commitment to the once-necessary war.

The size and shape of an American commitment to Afghanistan post-2014 remains unclear. To his credit Obama did negotiate a Bilateral Security Accord, but Karzai has refused to sign it. If Karzai's successor signs the deal, there is still the question of how many troops and how much money the U.S. will send: some in the administration, led by Vice President Biden, argue for a minimal commitment of a few thousand troops, who would be hard-pressed to defend themselves much less extend any real assistance to the Afghans. Only if Obama is willing and able to keep adequate troop numbers in Afghanistan post-2014 will the country be able to resist Taliban encroachments. If the U.S. decides to cut off the regime in Kabul, by contrast, it would be lucky to last as long as Najibullah did.

And if the regime in Kabul were to fall, the Taliban and their al-Qaeda allies would return en masse to Afghanistan. The country could once again become a haven for international terrorists and a base from which jihadists could destabilize Pakistan. It's still possible to avoid that outcome, but it will require learning the right lessons from the British and Russian experience and maintaining a robust post-2014 commitment.

Max Boot is a leading military historian and foreign policy analyst. The Jeane J. Kirkpatrick Senior Fellow in National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, he is the author of critically acclaimed New York Times best seller I*nvisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present*. His earlier books include *War made New: Technology, Warfare and the Course of History, 1500 to Today* and *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*. Boot holds a bachelor's degree in history, with high honors, from the University of California, Berkeley (1991), and a master's degree in history from Yale University (1992). He was born in Russia, grew up in Los Angeles, and now lives in the New York area.

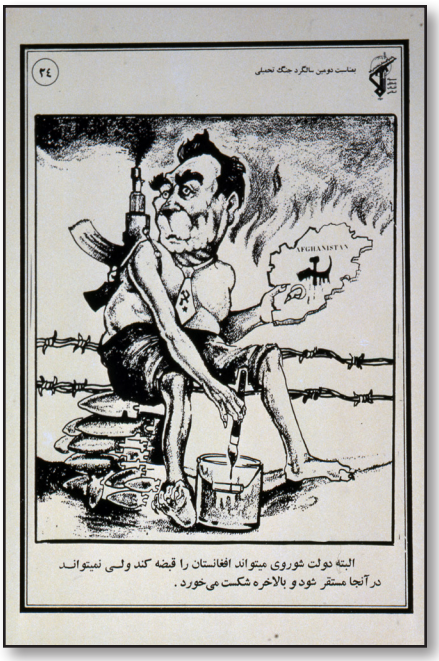
How Good is Afghan Good Enough? Anticipating Security Conditions in Afghanistan post-U.S. Troop Withdrawal

By Colonel Joseph Felter

U.S.-led Coalition forces have made significant and hard-earned progress building the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to take the lead in providing the security needed to bring stability, development, and governance to this persistently impoverished country with little history of effective centralized rule. Rampant corruption, a resurgent Taliban, limited penetration of the central government in the country's largely rural population, and waning enthusiasm among international aid donors, however, make for a daunting way ahead. On the eve of the next presidential elections this spring and the precipitous drawdown of U.S. and NATO forces—potentially to zero—by the end of the year, a number of pressing questions remain. Will the Afghan National Security Forces have the capacity to secure their population and quell the insurgency? At what pace can Coalition forces pull out without "pulling the rug out" from under the security situation? Can the Kabul government survive post-foreign troop withdrawal?

The answers to these questions even at this late date are unclear. Historical precedent provides some basis for optimism, however, that Afghanistan's security forces, with continued aid and support from the international community, may—at least nominally—carry out their mission to secure the country and prevent a return of Taliban rule after U.S. and NATO forces leave. Following the redeployment of Soviet combat troops from Afghanistan in early 1989, for example, the security situation did not entirely collapse despite the many dire predictions at the time.[1] In fact, with continued military assistance and enablers such as combat aviation assets,

1. Soviet troops trained and equipped the Afghan forces, and then turned over a number of major population centers for the Afghans to defend, including the garrisons of Jelalabad, Gardez, Ghazni, Kandahar, Lashkar Gah, Kunduz, and Faizabad, supported critically by Soviet aviation assets. While ceding much control of the countryside,



Poster Collection, IR 132,
Hoover Institution Archives

the Afghan security forces were able to prevent the collapse of Najibullah's government for nearly three years—up until the critical aid and assistance was cutoff with the fall of the Soviet Union.[2]

In the Soviet case, the ability for ongoing economic aid to sustain the Afghan regime they left behind—staving off total collapse and outliving even the Soviet Union itself—is a significant success of the Soviet exit strategy that is often overshadowed by Najibullah's bloody demise and the civil war that erupted soon after. Given this precedent, the interests of the U.S., NATO, and other members of the international community with a stake in the security and stability of Afghanistan are well advised to continue to provide security assistance and economic aid to Afghanistan well after the withdrawal of military forces.

Assessing ANSF capabilities relative to the standards of developed western militaries can be disheartening and cause pessimism about their anticipated capabilities post-U.S. troop withdrawal. Readiness issues, high desertion rates, limited organic enabling assets, poor accountability mechanisms, illiteracy, and other problematic factors can make it challenging to maintain a positive outlook for Afghanistan's security environment post-transition.

Encouragingly, however, the more relevant standard to hold Afghanistan's security forces to as the U.S. and NATO withdraw is whether they are more capable and proficient than the Taliban

the Soviet-trained Afghan security forces were able to secure major population centers and stave off a collapse of security post-Soviet withdrawal.

2. A rich primary source archive chronicling the Soviet experiences in Afghanistan as described by Politburo members and other senior officials can be found at Stanford University's Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Fond 89. For a description of the relevant information in this unique archive, see Katya Drozdova, "Solving the Afghanistan Puzzle," *Hoover Digest* (2010 no. 4), available at http://www.hoover.org/publications/hoover-digest/article/50306.

and other likely security threats Afghanistan might face. This standard is arguably achievable even with the well-documented ANSF weaknesses and shortcomings. To the credit of U.S. and NATO training and mentoring efforts to date, the ANSF is now taking the lead in security operations, holding their ground in head-to-head confrontations with the Taliban, and overall are prevailing against a variety of insurgent threats around the country. Importantly, these successes are in many cases dependent on the critical support of key Coalition Force enablers such as intelligence resources, mobility assets, and special operations forces.

Of concern, however, is the likelihood that the huge investments made in Afghanistan by the international community have led to the "purchasing" of a certain amount of cooperation among various leaders and stakeholders and held at bay some of the centrifugal forces such as competition among rival warlords. As U.S. and foreign investments are inevitably reduced and these incentives diminish, this cooperation will be harder to sustain. Given this, perhaps the biggest threat to the security of the country after the departure of U.S. forces hinges less on the capabilities of its security forces and more on its internal cohesion and the potential for ethnic divisions to fracture it.

Of even more concern is the sobering truism that, ultimately, counterinsurgency campaigns can only be as good as the government they support. Even the best, most effective security forces left behind when the U.S. departs cannot compensate long for failures in governance as they cannot "sell" a product—support for a central government—that most Afghans are reluctant to "buy."

JOSEPH FELTER is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and a senior research scholar at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University. Felter retired from the US Army as a colonel in 2011 following a career as a Special Forces and foreign area officer. He has conducted foreign internal defense and security assistance missions across East and Southeast Asia and has participated in operational deployments to Panama, Iraq, and Afghanistan. He led the International Security and Assistance Force, Counterinsurgency Advisory and Assistance Team, in Afghanistan, reporting directly to Generals Stanley McChrystal and and David Petraeus and advising them on counterinsurgency strategy..

The Folly of Abandoning Afghanistan

By Kimberly Kagan

If America's experience in Iraq offers any single, unambiguous lesson, it is the folly of just walking away. The United States must not repeat this mistake in Afghanistan. Isolation and disengagement have severely damaged American credibility and security, as can be seen most dramatically in Ukraine today. America's withdrawal of forces from Iraq did not "end that war," as President Obama claimed—it merely launched it into a new and even more dangerous phase. A similar retreat from Afghanistan would do the same there. Among other things, it would hand al-Qaeda yet another unearned victory after much effort and sacrifice had driven it to the brink of defeat.

The act of withdrawing forces is not neutral. It inevitably alters the dynamics within the host nation dramatically. The departure of U.S. forces from Iraq in 2011 transformed the political situation inside the country. Within hours of the movement of the last American troops out of the country, Prime Minister Maliki moved against his political rivals, attempting to arrest the Sunni Vice President, torturing his guards, and subsequently causing him to be tried in absentia and sentenced to death. Unchecked by any meaningful U.S. response and without fear even of the prying eyes of U.S. military forces, Maliki continued to target his Sunni opponents, generating a massive protest movement among disenfranchised Sunni Iraqis who felt themselves both vulnerable and betrayed by the Americans who had promised to stand with them against both al-Qaeda and Shi'a dictatorship. The political confrontation predictably escalated when the Iraqi Security Forces stormed a protest site in the name of dislodging terrorists, but instead killed several hundred people, mostly civilians. The incident fanned the flames of violent extremism and spread conditions conducive to the rebirth of al-Qaeda in Iraq, rebranded as the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (meaning the Levant) after it extended its area of operations to Syria.

Poster Collection, RU/SU 2321.9, Hoover Institution Archives

Violent attacks in 2013 in Iraq alone left 8,000 Iraqis dead. ISIS raised its flag over Fallujah at the turn of 2014, seven years after the combined efforts of U.S. forces and Anbari tribes had driven it out, and is contesting terrain from Mosul to Baghdad. The Iraqi Security Forces, though active and assisted by U.S. intelligence, cannot control the growing threat. Foreign fighters are joining the organization for operations in Iraq and Syria. Militant extremists, including ISIS and the favored al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, have safe haven in eastern Syria and western Iraq. Some foreign fighters are returning to their countries of origin, including Europe, according to testimony from the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper. The West thus faces the threat of combat-hardened jihadi fighters flowing back home, possibly to pursue jihad in Europe and the U.S. directly.

America risks causing analogous systemic failures in Afghanistan, where the politics are fraught, the neighborhood is rough, and the security forces are less mature. The president of Afghanistan who succeeds Karzai will lack his strength and patronage—even if supported by his power base. And the death of some of the stalwart old powerbrokers, such as Vice President Marshal Fahim Khan, leaves room for competition in an Afghan polity characterized by extreme fractiousness in the best of circumstances. The situation is analogous to Iraq in so many ways. The U.S. retreat from Iraq followed a heavily contested election in 2010 that came close to unseating Prime Minister Maliki and thus allowing for a peaceful transition of power. Iraq's dynamics, Iranian efforts, and the tepid and wrongheaded policies of a U.S. administration focused only on getting out allowed Maliki to hijack the election and pursue his sectarian agenda. Afghanistan will be in a similarly parlous place in 2014, as it will almost certainly see the first peaceful transfer of power

in many decades. The withdrawal of all American (and, therefore, Western) forces during such a critical moment in a very fragile state would be insane.

The U.S. continues to have interests in the fight in Afghanistan beyond the weight of the sacrifices already made—and the promises given to thousands of courageous Afghans who have risen up against the Taliban and al-Qaeda, counting on our assistance. The security threats presented by the Taliban and Haqqani network in Kabul and neighboring provinces remain, as we see in the spectacular attacks they have conducted in the capital. The next Afghan government will face a security threat that it is able to handle only with limited success at current troop levels. And al-Qaeda elements seek the opportunity to return to the Afghanistan side of the border as U.S. forces depart. In short, it is likely in the absence of robust U.S. forces that the political contests and insurgency can turn quickly into escalating violence and civil war.

That outcome would be a disaster for the United States. It would be another in a string of seemingly endless diplomatic and military defeats, furthering the growing narrative of American irrelevance and helplessness. And it would be another victory for a global al-Qaeda movement that is growing, despite the best efforts of Washington spin-artists to portray it as near defeat. Dealing with Afghanistan is hard. Dealing with Hamid Karzai has been intensely frustrating. Dealing with defeat, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda would be much worse.

Kimberly Kagan, is the founder and president of the Institute for the Study of War. A military historian who has taught at the US Military Academy at West Point, Yale University, Georgetown University, and American University, Kagan served in Kabul for fifteen months in 2010 and 2011 as a "directed telescope" to General David H. Petraeus and subsequently General John Allen, working on special projects for these commanders of the International Security Assistance Force. Admiral Mike Mullen, as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recognized Kagan for her deployment as a volunteer during this time with the Distinguished Public Service Award, the highest honor the chairman can present to civilians who do not work for the Department of Defense. She is the author of *The Eye of Command* (University of Michigan Press, 2006) and *The Surge: a Military History* (Encounter Books, 2009) and editor of *The Imperial Moment* (Harvard University Press, 2010).

With the Taliban's Strength Depleted, the Prospect for Stability Exists

By Thomas Donnelly

It is reasonable to expect that the current constitutional government—or at least a related form of it—will survive for the immediate future upon the 2014 drawdown of U.S. and other outside troops. There are, of course, a number of threats. Most attention is focused on the prospects for a Taliban return, but this seems a low probability: the Taliban are, broadly speaking, no more than a disruptive element in the Afghan struggle for power; it's doubtful they can claim the loyalty of a majority of Pashtuns, let alone many or any Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazara or other ethnic groups or the Kabul elite. Nor is it likely that support from Pakistan or Pakistan proxies can tilt the fundamental balance of power toward the Taliban.

This assumes that the querulous anti-Taliban coalition can weather the dual storms of the upcoming election and the withdrawal of their U.S. and Western sponsors. And of those two, the biggest hurdle is probably the election, given the games that current Afghan President Hamid Karzai is playing in designating his "favorite." An August pow-wow of Afghan power brokers produced rumors that Karzai was flirting with Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf, a died-in-the-wool Islamist and one-time buddy to Osama bin Laden. While this is certainly a case of Karzai misdirection intended to maximize his leverage with the Tajiks, a negotiating tactic and not a suicidal wish—Karzai knows he must fashion a deal that preserves the governing coalition—the Afghans' ability to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory should not be undersold.

Still, even with the loss of large-scale U.S. and Western support, the balance of power favors the Kabul coalition, which may also be able to find other sponsors, particularly India. And even

a small American military presence—one that shifts its focus from hunting al-Qaeda operatives with drones to maintaining a military equilibrium in Afghanistan and a modest strategic partnership with Kabul—would all but eliminate the danger of a Taliban return. The underlying Afghan coalition is a fundamentally sound structure; some American adhesive could fasten it more tightly. And then the United States could also free up forces to deal with the al-Qaeda structures that have been metastasizing while we've been obsessing with bin Laden, Zawahiri & Co.

THOMAS DONNELLY, a defense and security policy analyst, is the codirector of the Marilyn Ware Center for Security Studies at the American Enterprise Institute. He is the author, coauthor, and editor of numerous articles, essays, and books, including *Operation Just Cause: The Storming of Panama* and *Clash of Chariots: A History of Armored Warfare*. He is currently at work on *Empire of Liberty: The Origins of American Strategic Culture*. From 1995 to 1999, he was policy group director for the House Committee on Armed Services. Donnelly also served as a member of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission and is a former editor of *Armed Forces Journal*, *Army Times*, and *Defense News*.

Afghanistan's Fragile Political Landscape

By Mark Moyar

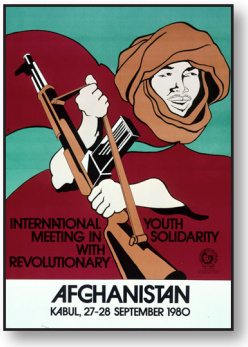
The future of Afghanistan's government will depend heavily on several complex and uncertain developments, including the April 2014 presidential elections and the number of non-Afghan combatants in Afghanistan after 2014. Although history cannot predict how Afghanistan will turn out, it does provide insights into the survivability of a fledgling democracy. In particular, it demonstrates that a government's durability depends much more on its people's cultural respect for democracy than on its constitution and other formalized rules.

Today's Afghan political elites have shown little respect for democracy or the law, in accordance with Afghan cultural traditions, and they are likely to show even less once the U.S. presence and aid have faded. Afghans who are in their twenties are more inclined than older Afghans to favor a liberal democracy guided by the rule of law, but they are not yet old enough to overrule older generations. Thus, the longer Afghanistan can postpone a crisis in governance, the better the chances for democracy's survival.

A separate but related issue is the ability of Afghan security forces to retain control of territory in the long-term. Here, too, culture exerts extraordinary power. Afghan culture encourages political opportunism and defection, especially in wartime. The American withdrawal combined with heightened insurgent infiltration from Pakistan could convince Afghan government leaders to switch sides. Whole areas of eastern and southern Afghanistan could fall quickly to the insurgents and spark an ethnic civil war.

MARK MOYAR is a Senior Fellow at the Joint Special Operations University. His books include *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (Yale University Press, 2009); *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); and *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism in Vietnam* (Naval Institute Press, 1997; University of Nebraska Press, 2007). He is currently writing a book on national security strategy during the Obama administration as well as a book on foreign human capital development. He holds a BA, summa cum laude, from Harvard and a PhD from Cambridge.

Discussion Questions



What will Afghanistan look like following the final U.S. withdrawal in 2014?

1. Was the American occupation of Afghanistan any different from past Macedonian, British, or Russian versions? If so, how?

2. At what point did the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan begin to go wrong?

3. What will happen to those Afghans who were invested in the American effort after we leave?

4. What will the U.S. do if Afghanistan reverts to its pre-9/11 status and harbors global terrorists?

STRATEGIKA

CONFLICTS OF THE PAST AS LESSONS FOR THE PRESENT

Hoover Institution | Stanford University | www.hoover.org | 650-725-3461

THE HOOVER INSTITUTION
Stanford University