

Assessing the new Afghanistan and Pakistan strategy

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As President, my greatest responsibility is to protect the American people ... We are in Afghanistan to confront a common enemy that threatens the United States, our friends and allies, and the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan who have suffered the most at the hands of violent extremists. So I want the American people to understand that we have a clear and focussed goal: to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future.”²

President Barack Obama, 27 March 2009.

Introduction

This is a serious moment in the Afghanistan campaign. This is the hearts and minds moment. The next two years will be critical if those with responsibility at the strategic level are going to give those with responsibility at the field level, Afghans and partners, both the tools to do the job and the place in which to do it. If by the end of 2011 the coalition has not a) moved from the security phase into a clearly agreed strategy of Afghan and civilian state capacity and local governance building; and b) to that end forged a new partnership with a government in Kabul that is committed to achieving a level of governance and government similar to that in regional states such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, with a commensurate level of officially-sanctioned corruption, then the coalition will be unlikely to sustain the effort over the 2012-2017 period called for in current planning.

To do that, the contradiction at the heart of Western thinking about Afghanistan must be overcome. Whilst much of the rhetoric of renewed effort in fact masks the first step towards an exit from Afghanistan, the renewed focus on Pakistan makes it very clear that, like it or not, the need for engagement with the latter will mean an open-ended commitment to the wider region that cannot be avoided and which will persist.³ First, the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan represents a threat not only to southern Afghanistan, from which the Taliban and Al Qaeda launch attacks on Coalition forces, but through the Pakistani Taliban a threat to the Pakistani state itself. Second, the fact that Pakistan is a nuclear power means that under no circumstances can it be allowed to fall into the hands of violent Islamists or jihadists. At this critical juncture this

chapter explores and assesses the new US Comprehensive Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan (AFPAK) and places it in a broad political and operational context.

Evident in the 2009 strategy papers of both the US and UK is the recognition that far from drawing to a close in Afghanistan what was always intended to be a stabilisation and reconstruction mission, the struggle is in fact widening to include the broader central and southern Asian region as part of a strategic stabilisation mission. Indeed, it is only now that the truly strategic nature of the struggle is becoming apparent.⁴ Both Afghanistan and Pakistan are after all victims of a war between the state and the anti-state in the Middle East which is now spreading to central Asia and the Horn of Africa. This, of course, raises as yet unanswered questions about strategy and ambition. How far does the West go to meet this challenge and what does it need to do to contain it (victory or defeat in such struggles are existential states that rarely exist)? Notably, the UK strategy, whilst mirroring much of the Obama AFPAK Strategy, has a far lower level of ambition, whilst most of the other European allies have been conspicuous by their silence, which in this context means only one thing – they want out and they want out quick. Which means it is pretty much all down to the Americans. AFPAK probably marks the end of any meaningful European input into high-level planning and thus reveals Europe for what it is – a decidedly parochial, regional grouping of small and medium actors in a strategic backwater.

The new strategic paradigm

The US March 2009 Comprehensive Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, which emerged from a sixty-day inter-agency review, is a truly strategic document. It recognises that the defeat of Al Qaeda cannot be accomplished by a focus on Afghanistan alone. Indeed, implicit in the strategy is a much clearer assessment of the reason for the US presence in central southern Asia. First, denying a nexus to an enemy in which strategic terror, huge but illicit criminal capital flows, and ageing but massively destructive technology can potentially come together is a Western strategic interest of the first order. Thus, whilst the improved life quality of Afghans and Pakistanis is central to the approach, it is a means to that end, it is not an end in itself of US strategy therein. Second, the Americans are signalling with much greater clarity than any of their European partners that they have a strategic understanding of the effort in Afghanistan, why they are there are what needs to be done. As US National Security Advisor James Jones said on 27 March 2009, “our strategy now starts with a clear and concise and, we think, attainable goal which is to disrupt, dismantle, and prevent Al Qaeda from being able to operate in its safe havens”.⁵

The US strategy has five main elements: establishing an attainable objective; a regional approach; building capacity and more training; using all elements of national power and bringing new international elements to the effort. The objective is to dismantle Al Qaeda and thus remove the threats to both Afghanistan and Pakistan posed by the foreign fighters. Notably, there seems to be a distinction with the home-grown Taliban which also reinforces the new political reconciliation strategy at the heart of the Obama strategy, which is to endeavour to divide the Taliban as much as destroy it.

Whilst significant elements of the new strategy resemble that of the Bush administration, it is the new Regional Approach that suggests a far higher importance will be accorded this struggle than hitherto by the Americans. This is reinforced by the appointment of Ambassador Richard Holbrooke as Special Envoy and General David Petraeus to CENTCOM.⁶ Essentially, the Americans will treat Afghanistan as two countries but one challenge, although a seasoned observer might suggest two countries, one nation (the Pashtun), one challenge. Afghanistan and Pakistan are to be engaged in a trilateral framework at the highest level and much higher profile to be given to key players across South Asia, most notably India. Indeed, India is not only crucial but is finally realising that far from being a regional-strategic competitor, Pakistan is a failing nuclear state on its northern border. This is an important shift in the perception of New Delhi. One immediate objective will be thus to decouple the conflict in Jammu-Kashmir from that in southern Afghanistan, which the Pakistani Army has traditionally seen as providing strategic depth in the event of a conflict with India. The April 2009 movement of six thousand Pakistani troops from the Green Line with India in preparation for the offensive against the Pakistani Taliban suggests early diplomatic progress by the Americans. Specifically, the Americans will seek to enhance intelligence sharing along the AFPAK border, as well as military co-operation and place relations in a wider economic context through trade, energy and economic development, which again suggest a much longer-term commitment to the region. This is also important, for with the appointment of counter-insurgency (COIN) expert General David McCrystal to command NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) a much more nuanced intelligence-led campaign will emerge, reinforced by the embedding of Coalition forces in rapidly deploying Afghan National Army units.⁷ This should help to ease the many tragic misunderstandings that have led to excessive civilian casualties in the last year.

The AFPAK Strategy also marks a big shift of emphasis from Iraq to Afghanistan. An additional seventeen thousand troops will be sent to Afghanistan to enhance security in and around the AFPAK border zone, whilst a further four thousand will be sent with a specific remit to accelerate the training of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP) as part of a general enhancement to strengthen Afghan

National Security Forces (ANSF). To ensure Afghan forces can begin to 'backfill' for coalition forces rapidly, every American unit will be partnered with an Afghan unit, and the US is seeking additional trainers from NATO allies to ensure that every Afghan unit has a coalition partner. Interestingly, the Pentagon wanted thirty thousand additional troops sent.

Central to the AFGPAK Strategy, however, is the enhanced support for civilian governance. Under the rubric of using all elements of national power, President Obama stated that, "a campaign against extremism will not succeed with bullets or bombs alone". The White House has thus submitted a budget to Congress that includes a significant new package of aid and development (including support for a bipartisan bill calling for \$1.5 billion of aid for the Pakistani people over five years) and calls for the creation of so-called Reconstruction Opportunity Zones in Afghanistan and border regions of Pakistan to develop the economy on both sides of the border in what is the Pashtun heartlands.

Finally, in a bid to internationalise (some would say de-westernise the identity of the mission) a stronger role is envisaged for the United Nations, particularly for UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan). Importantly, a new Contact Group for Afghanistan and Pakistan is being formed to include all those with a stake in regional security – NATO allies and partners, Central Asian states, the Gulf States, Iran, India, Russia and China.

Balancing realism with ambition?

Therefore, AFGPAK is at one and the same time more realistic and more ambitious. It is within that context that one must consider the so-called doctrinal gap that emerges from the failed Comprehensive Approach and the inevitable high-level trade offs that the new partners will demand for their collaboration. ALL of Afghanistan's neighbours will want something in return for supporting the US-led surge (for want of a better term) if the identity of the effort is to be de-westernised and thus an all-important long-term Regional Strategy engineered worthy of the name that can at the very least de-conflict the conflicts in Jammu-Kashmir between India and Pakistan and the insurgency in south and east Afghanistan. Only then will the true space for reconstruction and capacity building be crafted. Iran will want a broad security dialogue with the west and is keen in any case to shift away from the one-track debate on the nuclear issue, even if that is to buy it some time to weaponise its nuclear technology. Russia will want some movement on missile defence. Thankfully, that is in any case coming as the famous 'button' is reset. India will want support to prevent terror attacks from Pakistan and

Pakistan will want support to stop the spread of Pakistani Taliban and terror attacks both within and without the country. China will want some assurance that it can access Afghan resources, whilst the other 'Stans' will want assurances over future treatment of non-Pashtun ethnic groups in Afghanistan and demand some form of payment. The recent Kyrgyz manoeuvring over the continued American use of Manas airport, Bishkek demonstrates the price which the Americans will need to pay for continued support. Equally, played right, the Obama administration could well find it easier to do deals with some members of the non-Coalition awkward squad than with the Coalition awkward squad who do not want to be there, are doing as little as possible whilst there and are very keen to get out.

On the question of level of ambition and unity of effort it is interesting to compare the British and American positions. The UK Policy for Afghanistan and Pakistan: The Way Forward is much longer on rhetoric and far less on substance than the American strategy.⁸ In reality it is merely a cobbling together of existing UK efforts in both countries under a title that mirrors the American paper, although the British are offering a further £665m of aid and development to Pakistan over the 2009-2013 period and £510m over the same period to Afghanistan. Crucially, having promised the Americans to send a further two to three thousand British troops in support of the strategy the British Government (notably on the advice of HM Treasury) reneged and in the event only sent seven hundred and only to cover the August 2009 Afghan elections. Ironically, the UK is paying by far the biggest price for unrest in both Afghanistan with Britain being the main European market for Afghan sourced heroin, which now accounts for some 90% of the supply.⁹ Having allowed so many poor Pakistanis to immigrate to the UK over the past twenty years, the link between radicalisation of Pakistan and its Diaspora is self-evident. Indeed, one of the great unspoken political mistakes of British government policy has been to pretend no link exists between British security policy and immigration policy thus complicating both.

The UK AFPAC strategy lays out eight guiding principles. These include an international approach, a regional approach, a joint civil-military approach, a better co-ordinated approach, a long-term approach with such meaningless and contradictory assertions as calling for the respect for sovereignty and local values with respect for international standards with the demand for a hard-headed approach. It is a mark of Britain's descent into the strategic wilderness that such self-defeating political correctness is now the stuff of British strategy, be it towards Afghanistan, Pakistan or elsewhere. The fact is the British are not prepared to invest politically or financially at a higher level of effort at a crucial moment and will pay a political price with the Americans downstream. This is also an early example of the distorted influence minorities are likely to exert on the

foreign and security policies of western European governments fearful of the immigrant populations that have entered in such large numbers over recent years.

Afghanistan's complex reality

Can AFGPAK succeed? The Declaration of the International Conference in Support of Afghanistan of 12 June 2008 called upon the international community, the Afghan Government and the UN to support the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) thus recognising improvements in the life quality of Afghan people as critical to future stability. The Declaration also called for investment in infrastructure, growth of the private sector, improved delivery of government services, enhanced benefits from aid and development and enhanced regional co-operation. Importantly, it also called on the Afghan Government to combat corruption and to intensify counter-narcotics efforts as well as promoting respect for human rights. These are the basic elements of what will be in effect a new contract with the new Afghan Government, which will come to power with the August 2009 elections. Such a contract would provide the foundation for a much needed re-energised political and reconciliation track vital to stability in the country. Equally, it will challenge both the Coalition and the Afghan Government, as it remains questionable whether either party are able to deliver on promises made. This is the American dilemma because for all the optimism in the AFGPAK Strategy America's ability to achieve its own objectives is increasingly reliant upon the efforts of others who are at best recalcitrant and at worst downright obstructionist. Indeed, with the likes of China, Russia and, of course, Iran, on the new Contact Group the fate of both Afghanistan and Pakistan is increasingly linked to a wider strategic agenda that is itself complex and difficult.

Again, India in so many respects holds the key. Many in Pakistan's national security establishment have bristled at the close Indian government's relationship with Karza's government, India's wide-ranging development projects in Afghanistan, including on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and of course the special status of New Delhi's nuclear ambitions in Washington. However, Islamabad is now too distracted domestically to continue its struggle with India. There is thus a window of regional-strategic opportunity. If Pakistani anxiety about India could be reduced, it would enable the Pakistani government to direct greater attention and resources to combating the insurgents in the tribal areas along the Pakistani-Afghan border. This in turn would make it easier to combat the threat of insurgency in Afghanistan.¹⁰

And what of the European allies? Afghanistan still represents the most important immediate challenge for the west. Indeed, like it or not, the west's strategic standing in and credibility with the international community will to a significant extent rest upon the ability of the partners to fashion diplomatic, defence and development tools into something that can be defended as success. Since 2003, the situation in Afghanistan has progressively deteriorated. The initial success in overthrowing the Taliban regime has transitioned into a violent insurgency as the Taliban and other groups have stepped up their effort to overthrow the Afghan government. In the last year the Taliban has made major inroads both in Afghanistan and Pakistan and reported a number of important successes. As the insurgency has gained momentum, Coalition casualties have risen and a number of Coalition members have begun to consider pulling their troops out of Afghanistan. Notably, the Dutch will leave in July 2010 and the Canadians end 2011, which will leave the Americans and British (with some Australian support) battling to contain the difficult south and east of the country. Is it a sign of the new Anglosphere to come?

Clearly, it is time to talk to those elements of the Taliban who are seeking a return to Afghan life and that is indeed implied in AFGPAK. Sufficient evidence exists that many Tier Two and Three Taliban are not happy with the foreign fighters and seek their rights and property restored seized by the regime. Moreover, the murder of some two hundred tribal elders by the foreign fighters suggests the famed pashtunwali code of hospitality to fellow Muslims may be being stretched. Equally, no sound western strategy can be based entirely on such a fragile hope because the Taliban leaderships in Quetta and Peshawar are sufficiently radical and firm in the belief that they are winning that no local is going to place their hope in the west, whilst evidence of sustained success on the part of the latter is so hard for them to see. Indeed, the Taliban are becoming increasingly bold and as a result are beginning to appear in parts of Afghanistan outside the traditional Pashtun Belt. Moreover, the Taliban leadership firmly believe that in time they will set up an alternative government to Kabul in Kandahar. It is hardly surprising the Afghan people are sitting on the fence. AFGPAK must first roll back the Taliban if the wider political ambitions are to have any real chance of success.

Much will depend on the performance of the new Afghan Government. The growing insurgency has been accompanied by increasing corruption and an increase in drug production and trafficking, much of it with the collusion of local warlords and officials in the Karzai government. Afghanistan has become a virtual narco-state as a result. Indeed, the failure of the Coalition to wean farmers in the south off poppy represents a catastrophic failure of strategy and investment. With eighty-five percent of the population of the six provinces served by ISAF Regional Command South dependent on agriculture

for survival, without such a substitution strategy that works, it is hard to see any political reconciliation strategy working over the medium to long-term.¹¹

As a result, the US-led mission still faces a very real possibility of failing in time and it is NATO allies which could well get much of the blame from an America doubtlessly keen to shift responsibility. This would damage NATO's collective security viability (even if talk of NATO's demise is premature, as the Alliance will be needed for what is inevitably going to a big security century). However, failure in Afghanistan will certainly make it harder for NATO to remain central to American security, something European allies might wish to ponder. The sad fact for ISAF is that too many of the European allies went to Afghanistan with the wrong mindset, seeking only to do enough to keep America engaged in European security with the result that Europeans have by and large appeared far weaker than they are. The big loser from a disaster in Afghanistan will be Europe, as America goes its own way and the free-riding Europeans have enjoyed for decades is brought to a shuddering halt.

Indeed, the recent Coalition strategy has not worked. And, if the AFPAK Strategy is to gain traction, several other steps will need to be taken and supported by allies and partners both in the region and the Alliance. The main emphasis in Afghanistan now has to be improving the quality of life of the Afghan people rapidly and discernibly. The urgent political challenge is for Americans, Europeans and Afghans to finally agree on what success might look like. The establishment of a truly functioning, democratic state is not feasible, at least not yet. Rather the focus now must be on basic but robust instruments of government that reinforce traditional structures in pursuit of a) a reasonable level of stability; and b) the prevention of the return of terrorists.

A strategy of sorts at last

That said, those that despair of this mission are premature, as the application of any strategy – be it to Afghanistan and/or Pakistan is a surprisingly recent phenomenon and it would thus only be polite to see if one can work. Indeed, only at the 2008 NATO Bucharest summit were four strategic principles laid out – a long-term commitment to Afghanistan, Afghan leadership and civil primacy, a *real* comprehensive approach and the all important regional engagement.¹² Moreover, the 2009 NATO Summit Declaration on Afghanistan did agree on some important specifics; the NATO training mission, the provision of more police trainers, support for ANSF in the run-up to the elections, expanding Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) for expanding the ANA to 134,000, the expansion of the role of the Afghan National Army Trust Fund,

enhanced co-operation between Afghan and Pakistani governments, strengthening of the Integrated Approach with the UN to better synchronise cross-country civil-military efforts as well support for the UN election fund. However, a very profound doctrine gap exists concerning how best to adapt the way of doing business so that the Coalition can beat the enemy to the critical ground – the Afghan people. Again, what is still needed by *all* on the ground is a clear concept of minimum ‘success’ towards which to work, a shared level of ambition amongst all the partners, a shared *modus operandi* that bestrides security, a coherent and cross-Afghanistan stabilisation and reconstruction effort *and* sufficient unity of political effort to make it stick. Indeed, it has been the absence of any meaningful political leadership at the strategic level that for so long allowed the Afghanistan mission to drift into a series of military-technical initiatives with no clear statement of political object or method to drive them. That is where AFPAK adds real strategic value.

On the military side, security and stability in Afghanistan has historically required a balance between top-down efforts to create a central government, and bottom-up efforts to secure local support. Since 2001, the U.S. and international community have focused predominantly on top-down security efforts, including the establishment of an Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army. But the deteriorating situation and local nature of the insurgency require a much more intensive effort to work with local tribes, sub-tribes, and clans to establish order and governance in rural parts of Afghanistan. Indeed, only with a proper sub-national effort will the grand strategic effort implied by the AFPAK Strategy have a reasonable chance of success.

In addition, successful counter-insurgency efforts hinge on the competence of local security forces, not international ones. More international forces in Afghanistan may be helpful, but only if they are used to build Afghan capacity. One critical need is to address the international partnering gap that has plagued efforts to improve Afghanistan’s police and army. There is currently a seventy percent shortfall in international mentors for the police and a fifty percent shortfall for the army. The AFPAK Strategy aims to ease this problem but is still reliant on partners willing to share the burden with the Americans and the immediate post-strategy announcements are not encouraging with the deafening sound of many Europeans shuffling their feet and, albeit eloquent and refined, making their excuses all too audible.

Partnering Pakistan: difficult at the best of times

What is truly different about AFPAK is recognition of a reality of the region that the British Raj knew only too well – there can be no stability in Afghanistan if Pakistan is failing. Indeed, the British created a strong administrative system in that part of the Raj in the nineteenth century partly to prevent the chaos to the north from infecting and affecting its rule. The AFPAK Strategy will thus only make sense if it generates a truly coherent, comprehensive and above all coherent strategy toward Pakistan. The insurgency in Afghanistan is fuelled by radical Islamic groups based across the border in Baluchistan Province, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and NWFP in Pakistan.¹³ Thus, any strategy that concentrates solely or primarily on Afghanistan is bound to fail. That is why the Regional Strategy recognises the important linkage between the insurgency in Afghanistan and its roots in what is nominally Pakistan.

That is also why the \$1.5 billion of aid and development to be aimed directly at the Pakistani people will be so important as part of a coherent package of economic assistance. However, it will also need to help the Pakistani Government deal with challenges across the country, not just in the north-west and thus reflect a firm understanding of the effort that will be needed to reinforce Pakistani state institutions. Mass anger at rising food prices and electricity cuts has already led to widespread protests and undermined support for Pakistani President Asif Ali Zadari. Indeed, ongoing instability in the Punjab could wreck any hope of Pakistan continuing, let alone intensifying, its campaign against the insurgents in the largely ungoverned tribal areas that border Afghanistan because that will affect the one stable institution upon which the whole AFPAK Strategy relies – the Pakistani Army.

The April-May 2009 operations against the Pakistani Taliban saw the Pakistan Army in action less than eighty kilometres from Islamabad. Whilst the nature of the insurgents and the structure of Pakistan makes it unlikely that Islamabad will ever fall (and in any case Islamabad was put where it is in the 1960s precisely to mark Pakistani sovereignty across the whole of its territory), it is a mark of Pakistan's instability that the insurgents were allowed to exploit agreements with a weak government to gain so much ground so rapidly.

Equally, unless the AFPAK Strategy begins adequately to address the development gap in Pakistan's Pashtun areas, a root cause of extremism on both sides of the border and well beyond will continue to fester. Government institutions in the tribal areas are weak, and social and economic conditions are among the lowest in the world. Current international reconstruction and development assistance have too often been too focused

on the Afghan side of the border. That must change with AFPAK. Certainly, progress here will be vital as the US and NATO could win the hearts and minds of every Pashtun in Afghanistan, and still lose the war, since three-fifths of the Pashtun population lives in Pakistan.

Security progress would thus always be limited if tangible benefit to local, disaffected communities is not forthcoming. Without undermining the power of militant groups, however, it remains unclear who will benefit from development funds in the FATA and some sort of control will need to be exercised to prevent aid falling into the hands of the very people it is designed to help topple. At present, the most likely beneficiaries will be local religious leaders and militant leaders, as well as the military-run Frontier Works Organisation, none of which could be regarded as reliable partners for any such strategy. Political reform will in time also be critical if such an effort is to pay dividends and here AFPAK is less clear. This should include encouraging political developments, such as evaluating the Political Parties Act and the Frontier Crimes Regulation. Unfortunately, whilst the Pakistani government is keen to obtain funding for development, it has always been less willing to politically liberalise the tribal areas. Indeed, any discussions about expanding democratic rights in the FATA have always been limited by the scope of democracy throughout the rest of Pakistan.

The current military strategy must also be revised, not least because too often the Pakistani Army kills too many civilians when it embarks on offensives. A much greater effort should be invested in empowering local elements quietly and discreetly. It is thus vital that the institutions of state are reinforced in Pakistan and not undermined by action seen to be in support of AFPAK. To that end US military action in Pakistan will also need to be more discerning. Recent US ground incursions across the Pakistani border have generated widespread public opposition and run the risk of drastically undermining the Pakistani state and creating the very regional turmoil they are designed to prevent. A more tailored approach is thus needed to conduct effective counter-insurgency operations with the focus on generating effective police forces central to such a strategy in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. This will require better training of the Pakistani Army and the militias that pass for law and order in the FATA. It would also be useful to start working with the ISI to try and adapt it into a normal intelligence agency.

Making the strategy work

If the AFPAK Strategy is to work, at its heart a sound and agreed strategic campaign plan must be crafted to exploit new political alignments. The current concept of a three

strategic phase approach (security, governance and rule of law capacity building, and Afghan civil primacy) is sound so long as it is matched by political commitment in capitals, and a resource and governance effort that can be measured across the region in such a way that it is relevant to the critical ground for *this* strategy – the Afghan people (and their Pakistani counterparts). In a sense what the existing doctrine needs (which has tended to emerge from practice) is a strategy worthy of the name.

Early civilian ownership of AFGPAK will thus be vital but civilian international organisations (IOs), such as the UN and EU, still remain dangerously resistant to the need for more intense co-operation. AFGPAK should at the very least help to create the political context for civilian agencies to work more closely with their military counterparts. Moreover, the thinking behind PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) needs to be revised. The current application of the PRT model in Afghanistan is undermined by national differences on the ground at the expense of strategic effect. On top of that, it is unclear how PRTs will relate to the Reconstruction Opportunity Zones envisaged in AFGPAK. It would certainly be useful to make virtue out of necessity by picking one PRT as the ‘model’ under the rubric of the AFGPAK Strategy as a means to better harmonise the efforts of the various national actors. At the very least such a model would need to be reinforced with credible benchmarks that would also help to re-establish control.

Thankfully, the AFGPAK Strategy (taken together with the Petraeus campaign plan) will likely see much closer synergy between the counter-terror, counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics efforts, but the Afghan Government will need to prove itself capable of being a worthy partner over the next two years, because, after all, beyond 2015 Afghan civil primacy is the rightful objective.

As ever, much will depend on whether the pledged commitments are met with real commitments and to what extent the western NATO-led identity of the mission can become a UN-led international community effort with the sub-contracting role of the US, NATO and the EU very much more apparent.

Unfortunately, the length of strategic phases in much of the planning still seems to be governed by western domestic electoral cycles, rather than Afghan reality and an over-optimistic belief in the capacity of UNAMA and other UN agencies to fill the capacity-building vacuum, particularly as it concerns the construction of a relatively sound judicial system and the economic well-being of rural Afghanistan in the short- to medium term with regards to poppy income substitution. A first vital step will be the removal of Narco-Khans as the go-betweens between the Afghan Government and many farmers locked into them by allegiance and debt.

There is also the wider issue concerning the extent to which western states suffering from the credit crunch and other financial and economic ailments will be willing to foot the bill of what will still be a major financial commitment, the success of which offers no guarantee that the counter-terrorism goal will actually be achieved.

Success will thus be defined by the following basic but robust pillars of state plus a narrative of success. Afghanistan is well-placed, has significant natural capital that needs to be exploited, enjoys significant financial capital held outside the country by individuals and institutions of state are emerging (ANA, National Solidarity Programme, National Telecoms Programme, the health sector, to name but a few).¹⁴

Assessing the new strategy

The AFGPAK Strategy is an important new initiative, but, as indicated earlier, the next two years will be vital. The devil is in the detail and whilst the political and development demarches are to be welcomed, it is unlikely to succeed unless there is a firm grip of the fundamentals of successful stabilisation and reconstruction (S&R) at its core. This will involve a better understanding of realistic success, the fashioning of all the actors and institutions vital thereto into a plan of campaign of which all take ownership, all know their role, sequencing and prioritisation are understood and the metrics exist for the reasonable measurement of performance on the ground, rather than the ticking of boxes back in capitals. Unless AFGPAK is founded on such fundamentals, it will be little more than rhetoric and the Afghan people and Coalition forces deserve better than that. These fundamentals can be thus summarised:¹⁵

1. *Design a proper strategic framework for all efforts.* This is an essential *sine qua non* for success. For S&R operations to succeed, they must better harmonise and reconcile differences of perspectives and approaches, planning and metrics determining where and when to co-operate on S&R operations;
2. *Agree a basic methodology for S&R operations.* The Coalition needs to better help both Afghanistan and Pakistan to enhance the performance of state functions at a national, regional/provincial or local level. As clear a conceptual understanding as possible is needed early between different efforts and their sequencing throughout the security continuum.
3. *Understand the constraints of S&R.* External intervention can never substitute for what host states do on themselves. S&R operations are not COIN, although the latter

support the former. Two constituencies are vital – local people, who are the critical ground, and our own people, whose support is vital for what will always be a sustained effort over time and distance. This is particularly important for AFPAK.

4. *Promote effective inter-institutional synergy.* Institutions both legitimise effort and focus it, but in the end they are means to an end and in Afghanistan and Pakistan must be seen as essential elements of an effective campaign plan. The UN remains pivotal but needs its own capacity-building programme in this regard. For example, NATO and the EU each have unique capabilities and both uniquely have much to contribute to S&R operations. There needs to be a major effort to develop EU-NATO synergies covering S&R operations because thus far the EU effort on police training has been lamentable. Institutions are vital if the most effective balance can be achieved between military, diplomatic, intelligence and development efforts. At the very least the UN, EU and NATO jointly should promote a cadre of civil-military experts committed to promoting S&R interoperability to get trained civilians in at the beginning of campaign planning.
5. *Establish a stronger and more direct EU-US relationship.* The US and EU should jointly review the role of economic aid in the conflict zone as part of an effort to better tailor donor efforts, promote the early expansion of rule of law efforts, (how) to better enhance and support the role of the UN Special Representatives of the Secretary General, capacity-building for the UN and regional institutions, possibly in conjunction with the G8. Better understanding of the role and functions of IOs and NGOs, including better understanding of their core tasks and functions.
6. *Reconcile S&R operations with counter-terror and counter-insurgency.* A final and common understanding of the distinctions between S&R, counter-terror and counter-insurgency is needed, together with a common doctrine, so that all agree what it is they are engaged upon. Second, there needs to be better understanding between traditionally more-militarised America doctrine and its overly-civilianised European counterpart.
7. *Reinvigorate the relationship with the UN.* Over time the S&R operation in AFPAK will need to be de-westernised to better involve regional powers and institutions. European states will henceforth almost certainly require that all such operations be conducted under a UN Security Council mandate, with support from regional institutions.

8. *Launch and update a constant strategic narrative.* The choice of strategic narrative and the language therein needs to be better linked to progress in the AFPAK region, performance and publics both in country, in region and at home built on a compelling rationale for engagement. Moreover, a flourishing media should be a central aim of good governance. Above all, speak to the host nation with one voice.
9. *Give the Comprehensive Approach substance and meaning.* The entire AFPAK effort will be profoundly weakened if there is not a once and for all common definition of the Comprehensive Approach. A common definition of and a common approach to the Comprehensive Approach therein is desperately needed so that where possible it can be applied across the S&R effort. These are complex civilian-military and military-military undertakings that can as much complicate S&R as secure it. At the very least a common level of ambition and unity of command must be pursued from the outset. Such an approach would benefit from a cadre of elite civil-military planners who understand each other and can plan, direct and manage as part of a single framework for operations.
10. *Embed all S&R operations in a regional strategy.* All S&R operations will need to be owned by as many regional partners as is practicable.
11. *Place political reconciliation front and centre.* Talk to whoever, whenever. All S&R operations must have a political reconciliation strategy at their core. It is upon such a strategy that AFPAK will succeed or fail.

In the words of President Obama, “To achieve our goals, we need a stronger, smarter and comprehensive strategy”.¹⁶ Amen to that!

Notes

1. J. (Julian) S. Lindley-French is professor of Military Operational Arts and Sciences at the Netherlands Defence Academy, professor of Strategic Studies at Leyden University and Senior Associate Fellow at the United Kingdom Defence Academy.
2. *What's New in the Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan*, 27 March, 2009, www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Whats-New-in-the-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan.
3. It is interesting, the speed at which the political class in the US and UK are rushing to support a regional strategy which belatedly they claim always to have believed in. Speaker Nancy Pelosi stated on 27 March, 2009: “This strategy (AFPAK) rec-

ognizes a point that I have emphasized for years, and one that I shared with the President following my visit last month to Afghanistan, which is that we must have a regional approach to countering terrorism”. ‘Pelosi: President’s Comprehensive Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan is Right...’, *Reuters*, 27 March, 2009 www.reuters.com/articleId=US155703 .

4. It is surprising, the extent to which so many members of the Coalition seem to have entered Afghanistan without either a sense of strategy or history. Piers Brendon in his excellent book *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781-1997* writes of Afghanistan in the 1840s: ‘The First Afghan War had begun, its purpose being to keep the Russian Bear at bay and to intimidate the Himalayan tribes. ‘It was felt’, according to an article in the *Asiatic Journal*, ‘that the security of our Empire would be so irrevocably compromised whenever we were obliged, like the Empire of Rome in its decline, to buy off the barbarians on our frontier.’ See Brendon, Piers (2007), *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781-1997*, London: Vintage, p. 95.
5. *President Obama’s Afghanistan-Pakistan (AFPAK) Strategy*, 27 March, 2009, FPC Briefing, <http://fpc.state.gov/120965/htm> .
6. Much has been made of the appointment of Petraeus to CENTCOM because of the apparent success of the much-lauded surge in Iraq. However, Thomas Ricks puts the surge in context. ‘At the end of the surge, the fundamental political problems facing Iraq were the same ones as when it began...But it was almost certain that whenever it (fighting) did end, it wouldn’t be with the victory that the Bush administration continued to describe, of an Iraq that was both a stable democracy and an ally of the United States.’ *Pace Afghanistan? Ricks, Thomas E. (2009), The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2009*, New York: Penguin, p. 9.
7. Interestingly, General Stanley McCrystal also ran the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) and was this responsible for black operations, such as the US Army’s Delta Force.
8. www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/reports/afghanistan_pakistan.aspx .
9. See above report.
10. As Barnett Rubin points out, this will not be a quick fix. “Within Pakistan, integrating the Federally Administered Tribal Areas into what Pakistanis call the ‘mainstream’ is also not a quick fix. It will require a strategy that will take many years. There will be armed resistance by al-Qaeda and many other groups whose existence depends on the isolated nature of these areas. But gaining control of national territory in order to protect the rights of Pakistani citizens will certainly provide a more legitimate mission for the country’s security forces than assisting the United States in its ‘war on terror.’” Rubin, Barnett R. (2009), *End the War on*

Terror, Survival: The Struggle for Afghanistan, Abingdon: Routledge, p. 87.

11. From a report prepared by the author for Chiefs of Defence Staff, April 2008.
12. The Bucharest Summit declaration of 3 April, 2008 stated, "Working with the Afghans, we have made significant progress, but we recognise that remaining challenges demand additional efforts. Neither we nor our Afghan partners will allow extremists and terrorists to regain control of Afghanistan or use it as a base for terror that threatens all of our people. With our ISAF partners, and with the engagement of President Karzai, we will issue a statement on Afghanistan. This statement sets out a clear vision guided by four principles: a firm and shared long-term commitment; support for enhanced Afghan leadership and responsibility; a comprehensive approach by the international community, bringing together civilian and military efforts; and increased cooperation and engagement with Afghanistan's neighbours, especially Pakistan." See <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-049e.html> .
13. As ever, the devil is in the detail in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Pakistani Taliban, which made apparently spectacular gains early in 2009, is a case in point. *The Economist* states, "The Taliban are near Islamabad because the capital, a 1960s new town, was built close to the rugged border area where these Pushtun tribesmen live. But there is no chance of their seizing Islamabad. If, unthinkable, the disparate warlords who make up the Pakistani Taliban were to mass together for a frontal attack, Pakistan's army which is 620,000 strong and well-drilled for conventional warfare could crush them. Indeed, many pundits reckon that an Islamist takeover in Pakistan would be possible only with the army's support." 'A Real Offensive, or a Phoney War?', *The Economist*, May 2nd, 2009, p. 23.
14. See Ghani, Ashraf (2009), *A Ten Year Framework for Afghanistan*, Washington: ACUS, http://www.acus.org/files/publication_pdfs/65/AfghanistanReport_200904.pdf .
15. See Lindley-French J. (2009), *Enhancing Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations*, Washington: CSIS.
16. *President Obama's Afghanistan-Pakistan (AFPAK) Strategy*, 27 March, 2009, FPC Briefing, <http://fpc.state.gov/120965/htm> .

