

# Where will Afghanistan be in one, five and ten years' time?

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# Contents

1. Introduction .....	1
2. Background and current situation .....	3
Destruction of the Taliban’s conventional fighting capabilities .....	
Response of the international community .....	
‘Descent into chaos’ .....	
The situation in 2008 .....	
3. One year on: 2009 .....	8
Overview .....	
Major influences .....	
Political situation .....	
Security situation .....	
4. Five years on: 2013 .....	16
Overview .....	
Major influences .....	
Political situation .....	
Security situation .....	
5. Ten years on: 2018 .....	21
Overview .....	
Major influences .....	
Political situation .....	
Security situation .....	
6. The insurgency .....	25
Origins .....	
The Taliban’s goals and strategy .....	
The role of Pakistan .....	
Taliban tactics and equipment .....	
The influence of al-Qaeda and foreign fighters: an insurgency surge to come? .....	
Talks with the Taliban: reconciliation or capitulation? .....	
Prospects .....	
The future for the Taliban .....	
7. Security sector reform .....	35
Reform of the Defence Ministry and creation of an Afghan National Army .....	
Reform of the Interior Ministry and creation of an Afghan National Police .....	
Reform of the judiciary .....	
Disarmament .....	
Counter-narcotics .....	
Provincial Reconstruction Teams .....	
8. Possible variables—the chances of rapid and damaging change .....	43
Negative impacts .....	
9. Conclusions .....	46

# 1. Introduction

*Q: What changes do you see in the coming five years?*

*A: I have no idea. There are too many imponderables. If you had asked five years ago what Afghanistan would be like today, I would have been completely wrong and I don't expect that I would be right this time.*

Barnett Rubin, 20 June 2006.<sup>1</sup>

Given the volatile and often surprising twists of fate in Afghanistan's history, it is perhaps excusable if one of the most internationally acclaimed Afghanistan experts can shy away from making a predictive assessment of Afghanistan's prospects. It might explain why it is so difficult to find analysts making analytical projections into Afghanistan's future—at rate projections beyond the immediate 12 month period.

Many of these assessments suggest that we are at the critical and decisive point in Afghanistan's development in which it can either move forwards or fall back. The Presidential elections in 2004 and the Parliamentary elections in 2005 were heralded as crucial turning points. In 2007, the then UN Special Representative to Afghanistan, Tom Koenigs, said, after noting that 2006 and 2007 were both previously claimed as decisive years, quoted the current ISAF commander as saying that that 2008 will be the decisive year.<sup>2</sup> In February 2007, the Senlis Council said that southern Afghanistan was at a 'tipping point'.<sup>3</sup> In February 2008 they then stated that: '2008 is a pivotal year in the development of the Afghan state: the situation has reached a classic decision point.'<sup>4</sup> The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, and the new UN Special Representative, Kai Eide, also look to be falling into this trap (Moon: 'We are at a critical juncture in our efforts in Afghanistan' and Eide: 'I'm not saying that the next six months are decisive, but they're very important. ... It's a window of opportunity.').<sup>5</sup>

Clearly the initial optimism in the immediate aftermath of the Taliban's defeat was not justified, but it is important to counterbalance this. The crucial point is that if analysts fall into the trap of looking at the short term, i.e. six months, a year, two years, then a very different, and a much more negative, analysis is likely, compared to that which we would have if a longer term perspective was taken. This means decades.

The aim of this paper is to provide a predictive and provocative look at where Afghanistan is likely to be in 1, 5 and 10 years time, focusing less on the day to day detail and narrative and more on the likely general strategic trends over this time-frame. The intention has been to take the key political and military themes as they have developed since the defeat of the Taliban and to extrapolate them into the most likely outcomes over a ten year period.

<sup>1</sup> Rubin, B., 'Afghanistan: Interview with regional analyst Barnett Rubin', *IRIN*, 20 June 2006, <<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=34410>.

<sup>2</sup> Author's notes from a United States Institute of Peace webcast: 'The Situation in Afghanistan: A Discussion with UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Afghanistan Tom Koenigs', 21 Mar, 2007, <[http://www.usip.org/events/2007/0321\\_koenigs.html](http://www.usip.org/events/2007/0321_koenigs.html)

<sup>3</sup> Senlis Council, 'Countering the insurgency in Afghanistan: losing friends and making enemies', Feb. 2007, <[http://www.senliscouncil.net/modules/publications/Countering\\_The\\_Insurgency\\_In\\_Afghanistan](http://www.senliscouncil.net/modules/publications/Countering_The_Insurgency_In_Afghanistan)

<sup>4</sup> Senlis Council, 'Afghanistan: decision point 2008', Feb. 2008 <[http://www.senliscouncil.net/modules/publications/Decision\\_Point](http://www.senliscouncil.net/modules/publications/Decision_Point)

<sup>5</sup> Moon: 'We are at a critical juncture in our efforts in Afghanistan', 26 Sep.2008 report to the UN Security Council, <<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=aj8wIhzDO430#> and Eide: 'I'm not saying that the next six months are decisive, but they're very important. ... It's a window of opportunity.', 26 Sep. 2008, <[http://www.rferl.org/content/UN\\_Says\\_Afghan\\_Security\\_Worse\\_More\\_Police\\_Needed/1291721.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/UN_Says_Afghan_Security_Worse_More_Police_Needed/1291721.html)

Making predictive assessment of Afghanistan's likely future direction, given the volatility of the country and the region, is exceptionally difficult. Positive and negative assessments of Afghanistan's prospects have ebbed and flowed since the end of 2001. Assessment has been hampered by a lack of measurable data and the regular replacement of senior figures and command structures, particularly on the part of the international community.

There are some caveats in relation to the paper. Given the relatively short time period in which to produce the paper, it has not been possible to cover all aspects likely to impact upon Afghanistan's future progression in equal detail. Some themes are covered in only limited detail, others are not covered at all except in the most general of judgements. The paper attempts to focus on only a relatively narrow range of most likely military and political scenarios, rather than to discuss numerous permutations. In addition to three main sections concerning each of the three time periods, there are separate sections concerning the development of the insurgency and the progress of Security Sector Reform. As a reminder that the situation in Afghanistan remains fragile and volatile, the paper also includes a section identifying those much less predictable events which might happen over the ten years and their possible impact.

## 2. Background and current situation

It is not the purpose of this paper to re-examine in detail the origins of this latest stage of Afghanistan's troubles, but some shading in of background context is necessary. The inability of a multitude of international intelligence agencies to predict likely threats in time for them to be interdicted was thrown into sharp relief following the unprecedented scale of terrorist attacks against the twin World Trade Centre buildings in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. on 11 September 2001. With much justification, the USA immediately blamed Osama Bin Laden and the al Qaeda network. Bin Laden was based in Afghanistan at the time, where the continuous instability caused by an 11-year civil war and the shelter afforded by the Taliban, suited his purpose in terms of immunity from arrest and prosecution. Following the repeated refusal of the Taliban to comply fully with international calls to hand over Bin Laden, US-led military operation sanctioned through UN Resolution 1368 (recognising the US right to self defence) against the Taliban regime commenced on 7 October 2001.

In the absence of available conventional ground forces in sufficient numbers to conduct a campaign, the US operations relied upon a combination of cruise missile strikes, extensive employment of airpower, special forces and pragmatic and rapidly-arranged collaborations with the Taliban's opponent in the civil war, the Northern Alliance. The Northern Alliance was itself a loose collaboration of ethnic groups, warlords and militias with a reputation for fighting both the Taliban and each other.

### **Destruction of the Taliban's conventional fighting capabilities**

At this time, the Taliban were fighting in a fragmented, but broadly recognisable conventional fashion. This meant that they were ultimately unable to resist the combination of US military might and an emboldened Northern Alliance. The brittle crust of conventional Taliban military capability unravelled rapidly under the weight of US airpower and Northern Alliance ground assaults. The insertion of pro-US Pushtun leaders into the Taliban heartland to generate anti-Taliban resistance (Abdul Haq, who was killed early on, and Hamid Karzai, who wasn't—and subsequently became the first post-Taliban president) was a further contributing factor. Many Taliban leaders and fighters defected (in some cases *back*) to the Northern Alliance and many others elected to retire to the Tribal Areas of Pakistan where they would find supportive and like-minded Pushtun tribes. Many more still, dispersed to their home villages in southern Afghanistan and, temporarily at least, resumed normal tribal life. Kabul fell to the Northern Alliance on 13 November 2001 and the city at the heart of the Taliban support base, Kandahar, was captured a month later, on 13 December 2001.<sup>6</sup>

### **Response of the international community**

With the apparent removal of the Taliban as a viable political and military entity, the international community responded quickly with their own political and military initiatives. The UN's Special Representative of the Secretary General for Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, convened a major conference in Bonn over 27 November–5 December 2001 that brought together most of the significant Afghan

<sup>6</sup> Seyboldt, Taylor B., 'Major armed conflicts', *SIPRI Yearbook 2002: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2002, pp 40-42.

ethnic and tribal leaders to discuss a new plan for Afghanistan's future. Significantly, but certainly understandably to many Westerners and Afghans at the time, the Taliban, whose claim to legally rule the country was exceedingly tenuous, but who if nothing else could at least claim to represent a large proportion of the Pushtun ethnic group, were not invited to take part. This is judged by many—with the benefit of hindsight—to have been a mistake.

A UN—endorsed Bonn Agreement provided a direction for the reconstruction of a democratically-based political system in Afghanistan, commencing with an Interim Authority and followed by an Emergency Loya Jirga (ELJ) to choose a Transitional Authority. A Constitutional Loya Jirga would follow. Elections for President and Parliament would be held as soon as practicable, but no later than two years after the ELJ.<sup>7</sup>

The military strand to the international response was equally rapid: a multi-nation International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), headed up initially by a British command structure, deployed a military presence to Kabul on 20 December 2001.<sup>8</sup> It was approved by the UN Security Council Resolution 1386 and its initial role was, with a force of 3000 soldiers, to bring security and stability to Kabul while the development of a new Afghan government was established.<sup>9</sup> This force operated in addition to a large US military presence that was conducting its own activities under 'Operation Enduring Freedom' (OEF) who had gone there initially to bring down the Taliban and kill or capture Osama Bin Laden.

The efforts of the International Community intensified, focusing on the provision of aid, advice, training, reconstruction and security in Kabul and then into the wider country. Disarmament of warlords and militia groups (the DDR process) was a key priority in for the recently created (March 2002) UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, and was established in April 2003, a donor's conference in Japan held in January 2002 secured promises of some \$4.5Bn USD over five years. With this assistance, a fledgling interim Afghan government and administration, with Hamid Karzai at its head, began to emerge: a Loya Jirga approved the re-drafted Afghanistan Constitution in January 2004 and successful Presidential elections in October 2004 confirmed Karzai's position. The first parliamentary elections in over 30 years were held in September 2005, and in January 2006, the London Conference inaugurated the five year Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS).<sup>10</sup> On paper at least, the future prospects for Afghanistan were looking good.

<sup>7</sup> Maley, W., *Rescuing Afghanistan* (C. Hurst and Co: London, 2006), pp. 31-32.

<sup>8</sup> The multinational International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is mandated under Chapter VII of the United Nations (UN) Charter (Peace Enforcing) by UN Security Resolutions 1386, 1413, 1444, 1510, 1563, 1623, 1659 and 1707. It exists in accordance with the Bonn Agreement of 6 December 2001. ISAF's stated primary role is to support the Afghanistan Government in providing and maintaining a secure environment in order to facilitate the re-building of Afghanistan. More than 50 000 troops make up ISAF, with contributions from 40 nations and ISAF's area of operations covers the whole of Afghanistan. ISAF website <<http://www.nato.int/ISAF/index.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Seyboldt, Taylor B., 'Major armed conflicts', *SIPRI Yearbook 2002: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2002), p. 44.

<sup>10</sup> The London Conference on Afghanistan provided the formal launch of the Afghanistan Compact. The conference discussed the key elements which the Compact addresses: security, governance, reconstruction, development and counter-narcotics. The conference provided an opportunity for the Government of Afghanistan to present its Interim National Development Strategy which sets out its political and economic plans and priorities for the next five years. It was also an occasion for the international community to renew its political and financial commitment in support of the Strategy, and of the goals agreed in the Compact. <<http://collections.europarchive.org/tna/20080205132101/><[http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMar](http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&cc=Page&cid=1133773247211)

### **‘Descent into chaos’**

Working against this progress, with slowly increasing capability, confidence and resources, the Taliban began to re-emerge. The North West Frontier Province, Baluchistan and the Tribal Areas of Pakistan provided an invaluable safe haven from which to regroup, retrain and re-arm. In the spring of 2002, the last groups of hard core Taliban and al Qaeda fighters were defeated and retreated during the course of US-led Operation Anaconda fighting in south-eastern Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup>

The Taliban’s morale probably reached its lowest point in the aftermath of the Presidential elections of 2004, where it appeared the Afghan population were very happy to take part in a democratic electoral process despite the threats and warnings made by the Taliban not to take part. But since their fall in 2001, the remnants of the regime continued to make efforts to re-establish themselves as a viable political and military force. The Taliban gradually evolved into an effective insurgency. Perhaps the turning point in Taliban fortunes was demonstrated clearly during the fighting in southern Afghanistan in the summer of 2006: ‘British paratroopers have, as senior commanders admit, been involved in the most prolonged period of intense fighting since the Korean War. What should have been a security operation covering a major reconstruction effort to win “hearts and minds” has turned into a full-blown war’.<sup>12</sup>

The prime reasons for the ongoing persistence of the Taliban-led insurgency are:

1. A historically strong tribal gun culture and rejection of external control.<sup>13</sup>
2. A large base of residual ‘folk’ experience of guerilla fighting against the Soviets.
3. A unifying motivation in Islam, compatible with Pashtun tribal values.
4. A ‘safe haven’ in Pakistan’s tribal areas from which to regroup and reorganise.
5. A pool of recruits from amongst poor and uneducated groups on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border, combined with growing strength and support from within the Pakistani Taliban extremist groups.
6. Inspiration (and some practical knowledge gained) from the insurgency in Iraq.
7. The practical geographical, financial and infrastructural difficulties encountered by the new Afghan regime in extending its reach and influence, despite assistance from the international community.

### **The situation in 2008**

The story of 2006 to 2008 has been that of increased insurgent capability overshadowing the efforts of the international community and the Afghan government. Rebuilding Afghanistan has been hampered by a lack of strategy, poor co-ordination and a fragmented approach. This is perhaps understandable, and to some analysts, even inevitable, given the vast array of power-brokers, interest groups and influential political, military, economic and humanitarian parties, both within the international community and the Afghan government. The need to confront a growing insurgency at the same time has created increasing strains within the international and

<sup>11</sup> Operation Anaconda was a US-led military operation that confronted al Qaeda remnants in south east Afghanistan in March 2002. Coalition forces from Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, and Norway also took part. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/oef-anaconda.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Tweedie, N., ‘Troops use up ammo as war with Taliban claims 14th life’, *Daily Telegraph*, 28 Aug. 2006.

<sup>13</sup> ‘...the Pathan—of whatever tribe—has a strong pride in being a Pathan. The tribal group is the limit of the extent to which the Pathan is prepared to abate his jealously guarded individualism... ..To the world outside his tribal group...the Pathan’s attitude alternates between a total indifference and a kind of tigerish contempt for the rest of the human animal kingdom... ..all this makes the Pathan a man to be liked and respected, to be treated tactfully and carefully; and a man rarely, if ever, to be organised within the impersonal conventions of a modern state’. Griffiths, J., *Afghanistan* (Pall Mall Press: London, 1967), p. 61.

Afghan effort. There have been growing tensions between ISAF and the Afghan government over the continued civilian casualties being caused by air attacks. The developing strength and confidence of the Taliban has painfully spotlighted these weaknesses.

As a result, analysis of the current situation has become increasingly pessimistic. It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves briefly of the conclusions from a range of academic and government institutions over the last twelve months:

1. November 2007, Senlis Council: “Stumbling into chaos: Afghanistan on the brink”.<sup>14</sup>
2. January 2008, Atlantic Council: “Make no mistake, NATO is not winning in Afghanistan”.<sup>15</sup>
3. January 2008, Afghanistan Study Group: “The mission to stabilise Afghanistan is faltering”.<sup>16</sup>
4. January 2008, Manley Report: “...serious failures of strategic direction, and persistent fragmentation in the efforts of ISAF and NATO...”.<sup>17</sup>
5. January 2008, ECFR: “Failure in Afghanistan is now a realistic prospect...”.<sup>18</sup>
6. February 2008, ICG: “Afghanistan is not lost but the signs are not good”.<sup>19</sup>
7. August 2008, CSIS: “...as many analysts have already reported, the Afghan/Pakistan War is a conflict that the US and NATO/ISAF are now losing”.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps as another indicator of increasing pessimism, the CSIS assessment of 8 months earlier from the one given here had been: ‘The US and NATO/ISAF are not winning in Afghanistan’.<sup>21</sup>

As we move to the end of 2008, the Taliban do appear to have had another successful year and the international community indulges itself in increasingly public outbursts of self-doubt and recrimination. The Afghan government continues to struggle with itself – its limited capability, particularly with its human resources, corruption and lack of influence across the country. The parliament remains fragmented, naïve and driven by a range of ethnic, factional and personal agendas that do much to slow the work of development and reconstruction in the country.

Although there is much good work being done by NGOs, ISAF, PRTs and the Afghan government, most is piece-meal, costly and difficult to sustain. Reform of the security sector (army, police, judiciary, disarmament and counter narcotics)

<sup>14</sup> Senlis Council, ‘Afghanistan on the brink’, Nov. 2007, <[http://www.senliscouncil.net/modules/publications/Afghanistan\\_on\\_the\\_brink](http://www.senliscouncil.net/modules/publications/Afghanistan_on_the_brink).

<sup>15</sup> Atlantic Council, ‘Saving Afghanistan: An Appeal and Plan for Urgent Action’. Issue Brief, Jan. 2008, <<http://www.acus.org/programs-security.asp>.

<sup>16</sup> Jones, J., Pickering T., ‘Revitalising our efforts, rethinking our strategies.’ Afghan Study Group, 30 Jan. 2008, <<http://www.thepresidency.org/Leadership/afghan.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Manley, J., ‘Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan’, Jan. 2008, <<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0802-e.htm#manley>.

<sup>18</sup> Korski, D., ‘Afghanistan: Europe’s forgotten war’, European Council on Foreign Relations, 21 Jan. 2008, <[http://www.ecfr.eu/content/entry/afghanistan\\_report/](http://www.ecfr.eu/content/entry/afghanistan_report/).

<sup>19</sup> International Crisis Group, ‘Afghanistan: the need for international resolve’, Asia Report no. 145, 6 Feb. 2008, <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5285&l=1>.

<sup>20</sup> Cordesman, A., ‘US security interests after Musharraf’, CSIS paper, 21 Aug. 2008, <[http://www.csis.org/index.php?option=com\\_csis\\_pubs&task=view&id=4810](http://www.csis.org/index.php?option=com_csis_pubs&task=view&id=4810)

<sup>21</sup> Cordesman, A., Open letter to US House Committee on Armed Services, CSIS, 16 Jan. 2008 <[http://www.csis.org/index.php?option=com\\_csis\\_pubs&task=view&id=4293](http://www.csis.org/index.php?option=com_csis_pubs&task=view&id=4293)



progresses in a very patchy fashion, the Afghan National Army continues to increase in size and capability but the Afghan National Police remains woefully inadequate.

The stepping down of President Musharraf and the establishment of a new civilian government in Pakistan was cause for some initial optimism and there have been renewed attempts by the military to confront insurgents in the Tribal Areas. However, the new government's control over both the economy and the security situation looks weak. There are worrying suggestions that support for the Taliban is still extant within Pakistani military and intelligence circles. The Tribal Areas have continued to provide a safe haven for insurgent groups in 2008.

### 3. One year on: 2009

*In 2009, we should see Afghanistan on the road to peace with the back of the resistance broken -...The priority now is to deploy sufficient forces...*

NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, February 2007.<sup>22</sup>

#### **Overview**

It is highly likely that the political and military landscape in Afghanistan in November 2009 will be very similar to today's political and military situation. Eight years after military intervention removed the Taliban regime, the international community and the still immature Afghan government will still be managing a very complex crisis in Afghanistan. Efforts to reconstruct, rebuild, develop the economy and educate and employ its population, which would be difficult at the best of times, will be grotesquely distorted by an insurgency that continues to grow in strength, confidence and capability. The build up to and fall out from the Afghan and US presidential elections will be causing uncertainty and a hiatus in many security activities which may last through 2009 and into 2010.

#### **Major influences**

The international military forces will have spent the summer of 2009 grappling with an emboldened Taliban-led insurgency. Part of a 'surge' of primarily US forces will have taken place, probably increasing ISAF and OEF troop totals by 10 000 or so. Results from this reinforcement will be unclear at the end of 2009. Poppy cultivation, opium production and narcotics smuggling will continue to flourish across large parts of the country. Parliament will be weak and only partially effective, rendered thus by a myriad combination of religious, ethnic and political alliances.

Taliban military intervention will remain a mix of guerrilla, terrorist and criminal groups loosely exploiting the name 'Taliban'. Their activities will be more effective than 2008. Corruption and lack of capability will be widespread amongst key government administrative and security organs and will greatly undermine the credibility of said institutions.

The Presidential elections, at time of writing, scheduled for October, may have taken place, although, given the track record of the two previous post-Taliban elections, Presidential and Parliamentary, in 2004 and 2005 respectively, a delay of some months, possibly into 2010 is likely. This may have a "knock on" effect on the Parliamentary elections planned for 2010.

#### *The strategy debate*

In Afghanistan, it is not so much about what *is* happening, as what people *perceive* is happening. Perception is crucial and just now the international media is fuelling the perception of growing failure in Afghanistan. There are increasingly strong criticisms of progress in the world media and in the academic and analytical communities. Calls for a change in strategy are coming from every direction—from governments, domestic populations, academics, the military and within Afghanistan. International governments are now actively talking about options for withdrawing their forces. In September 2008, Canada declared its intention to pull out its military force in 2011.

<sup>22</sup> John, M., 'NATO chief sees Afghan insurgency smashed by 2009', *Reuters*, 10 Feb. 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/articlePrint?articleId=USL1074669>

The Dutch are to withdraw in 2010 and the Danes will start pulling out in the same year. Perhaps of even greater concern at the moment is the speed with which the international community is declaring the urgency of talking to the Taliban, which must be of supreme comfort to the Taliban leadership.<sup>23</sup> It is perhaps interesting to note how the meaning and intent of talks has shifted over six years, from reconciling with a beaten force in 2002 to potential power-sharing agreements in 2008.

Not far under the surface, there is evidence that strategies are being seriously questioned, of tension between allies, governments and international civilian and military organisations. Assessment of likely progress is in the negative. The US is frustrated at the caveat system which limits NATO willingness to engage in combat operations. At time of writing there is much debate within the US election campaign over whether a “surge” of forces of the kind deemed successful in Iraq will also work in Afghanistan, the huge differences between the two countries and their problems notwithstanding. Both Republican and Democrat look likely to accede to US Army requests for additional troops—perhaps two to three brigade equivalents (approximately 10–12 000 troops in total).

In October 2008, the UK ambassador to Kabul was reported, in controversial circumstances, to be opposed to additional US forces coming to Afghanistan:

The presence — especially the military presence — of the coalition is part of the problem, not the solution. The foreign forces are ensuring the survival of a regime which would collapse without them. In doing so, they are slowing down and complicating an eventual exit from the crisis (which, moreover, will probably be dramatic).<sup>24</sup>

However much clichéd solutions and commitments abound (“failure is not an option”, “what we need is a comprehensive approach”, “the Taliban cannot be defeated by military means alone”), the situation *is* getting worse each year. But it is easier to talk of changing strategy than it is to coherently design and implement a new one. If the international efforts to rebuild Afghanistan can be likened to a heavily laden oil tanker, a slight change in direction will take a lot of time and distance before the effects (good or bad) are felt and a major change might break the tanker’s back. Ironically, at a time when the US are looking to pump in more troops, Canada and Europe is looking to pull out forces.

These highly public disputes within the international community and discussions about “alternative strategies” are fraught with worrying implications. If the international community has spent seven years going wrong so far, how many years might it take to correct this, how many years to get a new strategy under way, how many years to make it work and how hard will it be to convince the Afghan population that this time the strategy is correct? The most likely trend is for the Afghan government to increasingly pull in its own direction, attempting to “Afghanise” reconstruction and security efforts itself, paying progressively less attention to Western concerns.

There are three unfortunate ironies that become apparent as a result of the media debate and associated discussions about the need for strategy change. One is the risk that a self-fulfilling prophesy is created, regarding Afghanistan’s likely failure. Directly related to this is the encouragement that is given to the insurgency. Finally, a strategy will not happen simply because it looks good on paper.

Any new “strategy” created will be dependent on:

<sup>23</sup> Blitz, J., ‘Doubts on war strategy leave US open to Taliban talks’, *Financial Times*, 10 Oct. 2008, <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/957a3238-9665-11dd-9dce-000077b07658.html>

<sup>24</sup> Starkey, J., ‘British ambassador warns against Afghan surge’, *The Independent*, 2 Oct. 2008, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/british-ambassador-warns-against-afghan-surge-948910.html>

- a) The willingness of the international community to participate in it and pay the price (e.g. casualties, cost, length of commitment, troop levels, fighting insurgents in the south, counter narcotics...).
- b) The capability of the Afghan government to work with it (e.g. corruption, lack of resources and infrastructure).
- c) The tolerance of the Afghan populace for the resultant activity (or inactivity) in their own villages and districts (e.g. collateral damage, obedience to central government).

If it is not possible to significantly change these key factors, then any new “strategy” will probably quickly end up looking like the old strategy, albeit at a cost of another three or four years time of Afghan tolerance.

### *Surrounding region*

The influence and activities of neighbouring countries will remain crucial to Afghanistan’s progress. The importance of the role of Pakistan and the political direction it takes over the next year will be very important. However, the new civilian government in Pakistan appears weak. It will struggle to grip the Pakistani military and intelligence systems. The Pakistani military will continue to seek influence in Afghanistan and judge that India will be trying to work against these goals. Pakistan’s military activities against insurgents in the FATA will again prove indecisive in the coming year. Pakistani military and intelligence assets, or former assets, will continue to maintain “deniable” ties with Taliban insurgent groups. Some of these ties will involve more direct military, financial and training support.

Pakistani military forces flew repeated helicopter missions into Afghanistan to resupply the Taliban during a fierce battle in June 2007, according to a U.S. Marine lieutenant colonel, who says his information is based on multiple U.S. and Afghan intelligence reports.<sup>25</sup>

Afghanistan's western neighbour, Iran, while continuing to offer genuine support to Afghanistan in reconstruction, economic and counter-narcotics areas and having a vested interest in Afghanistan's continuing stability and development, will remain concerned over US strategic intentions in the region. In the 1990s, the Iranian regime had significant influence with Shia groups and Afghan warlords based in western Afghanistan (Ismail Khan). Now, with significant US military forces to the west in Iraq and the east in Afghanistan, Iran will continue to monitor US deployments and activities. Although Iran does not ultimately support a Sunni insurgency in the long-term, Iran will be concerned if either side—US or Taliban—win a significant victory. Reporting that weapons and IEDs of Iranian origin are making their way into the hands of Taliban insurgents look credible and may represent a warning to the US government.<sup>26</sup> In the event of a deterioration in relations with the international community and/or the US, Iran is likely to consider international targets in Afghanistan as viable targets.

<sup>25</sup> Foxley, T., ‘the appearance of an individual described as a “former Pakistan soldier”...engaged in giving live fire small arms instructions to a group of Taliban fighters inside a compound...’, *SIPRI Afghanistan Blog*, 25 Sep. 2008, <<http://blogs.sipri.org/Afghanistan/interview-with-a-new-afghan-incarnation-of-the-taliban>>, Naylor, Sean, D., ‘US Officer: Pakistani Forces Aided Taliban’, *Defense News* 19 Sep. 2008, <<http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=3733901>>

<sup>26</sup> Clark, K., ‘Iran “sending weapons to Taleban”’, *BBC News*, 15 Sep. 2008, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7616429.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7616429.stm)>

### *International community*

The incoherent nature of the international community's efforts has hampered progress since 2001—many different nations, many different agendas, many different priorities, working practices and caveats. The key weaknesses—lack of strategy and lack of coordinated effort—have been made worse by the continual turn around of international personnel. The military standard length of tour is six months, civilian personnel are contracted on average for a year. Some contractors are brought in for a matter of a few months—and even weeks.

Relations with the Afghan government and its people are built and lost—lessons are learned, forgotten and learned again and at a more expensive price. Some Afghan provincial governors may now have dealt with as many as ten PRT commanders. President Karzai has had to work with eleven different ISAF commanders from seven different nations. Some ISAF commands have been proactive, engaged and visible, others less so. This is a source of great frustration to both the Afghan government and international community alike and will continue through 2009.<sup>27</sup>

The military, financial and intellectual engagement of the international community will remain the foundation of Afghanistan's progress. In November 2009, international commitment will still be very strong and very evident. Unless there is a very significant downturn in the security situation in 2009 (which this paper judges unlikely), there will be no significant national or NGO withdrawal from Afghanistan by the end of 2009. However, to the Afghan government and to Afghans with access to the international media—of whom there are many—a genuine long-term commitment beyond five years time will be looking increasingly fragile, for all the pronouncements of support from institutions such as NATO and the UN.

### **Political situation**

The Afghan political landscape in 2009 will be heavily influenced by:

- a) Afghan government relations with the international community
- b) The Afghan Presidential elections (whether or not they are actually held in 2009)

The Afghan Parliament will become increasingly vocal on emotive issues—ISAF air-strikes killing Afghan civilians, the insurgency finding safe haven in Pakistan, frustration over lack of progress on a range of economic, developmental and security. The issue will still be a significant problem for international community and Afghan government relations. The Afghan parliament will be looking for ways to control ISAF and US air-strikes.

The political scene by the time of the next set of elections will still be immature—true national political parties are not yet functioning and voting blocks and power-bases remain dependent upon the dominant and often malign influence of powerful individuals within and without Parliament. Personal, ethnic and tribal agendas will continue to dominate. Open debate and electoral campaigning will remain rare, what there is will be clumsy and naive. Above all, and across Afghanistan, there will be the understanding that block votes and loyalties to individuals will count more than personal political choices and a secret ballot.

Karzai has stated that he will run again for the Presidency, although his success this time is much less certain. He is much less popular than when he secured the

<sup>27</sup> Author's discussions with Afghan government advisors and PRT members, 2008.

Presidency in 2004. There is considerable criticism about his management style from all directions: the international community, NGOs, and his Parliament.<sup>28</sup> What, from Karzai's perspective, is a genuine effort to embrace and engage with all key Afghan groups and power-brokers, including warlords, former Jihadis from the struggle against the Soviets, religious and ethnic leaders and even the Taliban, is often portrayed as weak and compromised leadership.

For the Presidency, however, plausible candidates other than Karzai, remain few and far between, even though there are many talented individual Afghans (including from within the diaspora). Others will claim better "Jihadi" credentials—against the Soviets and the Taliban. It is important not to overlook the importance that many Afghans attach to this—hence the resentment of many that fought the Soviets towards those of the diaspora who left to live in other countries only to return when the Taliban were defeated.<sup>29</sup> This will resonate well in many influential circles, particularly those of the former Northern Alliance, now loosely reincarnated as the National Front political grouping.

However, setting aside Karzai's undoubted loss of popularity since his election, there are still not many evident potential leaders that can offer a similar (let alone better) package of:

(a) acceptability to the US; (b) broad acceptability to the remainder of the international community; (c) broad acceptability to all ethnic groups; (d) personally untainted with allegations of corruption or human rights violations; (e) apparent freedom from personal, religious or ethnic agendas

Hamid Karzai probably still represents the best option for taking Afghanistan forward. Any new President coming to power would likely see a hiatus in government for six months to a year as key personnel—in cabinet, ministries, and local governance are reshuffled or struggle to work with the new leadership and potentially new strategies. Power-brokers—Rabbani, Ismail Khan, Abdul Rashid Dostum, Abdul Sayyaf and numerous others—are likely to try to trade their support in exchange for promises of positions of influence. The electorate is however relatively naïve and suffering the frustrations of lack of economic growth and a persistent insurgency. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, as with many Western electorates, the "pendulum effect"—the temptation to assume that any new and untested alternative is probably better than the existing system—may prove irresistible.

### *Election timings*

The Afghan elections are unlikely to take place on time—for reasons both of logistics and security. If there is even a slight delay likely, this will push the election date into wintertime, with a whole additional range of logistical and mobility problems—accessibility to the Hazarajat—the central Afghan highlands—difficult at the best of times, would be particularly problematic. A postponement into the spring of 2010 looks the most likely time-frame—either it has to take place on time or wait out the worst of the winter to avoid the risk of disenfranchising some of the electorate.

<sup>28</sup> Constable, P., 'Afghan Leader Losing Support: Foreign, Local Allies Cite Weak Karzai Leadership', *Washington Post*, 26 June 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/25/AR2006062500866.html>

<sup>29</sup> Nooristani, H., 'The Hyphenated Afghan and the future of Afghanistan', 25 July 2006, <http://afghanistan.developmentgateway.org/Content-item-view.10976+M56292ed5c46.0.html?&L=0>

*Likely election outcome*

The Taliban may well choose not to try to stop the elections with force, recognising the risk that targeting and killing the Afghan populace may backfire, although intimidation and attacks on registration and voting posts and the security forces associated (most likely ANA and ANP) will ramp up. The elections are likely to take place and be declared broadly free and fair. Hamid Karzai, should he run again, receive the support of the international community and make some efforts towards campaigning (for which he showed little enthusiasm in 2004), should just about secure a second term of office. However, the chance that another contender—either from the former Northern Alliance groupings (such as Younis Qanuni or Burhanuddin Rabbani) or the Pushtun diaspora (Ali Jalali or Ashraf Ghani) takes the presidency is more likely than it was in 2004, given Karzai's apparent increasing unpopularity.

*'Hearts and Minds'—the Afghan popular mood*

Perhaps surprisingly, given the numerous casualties suffered from misdirected air-strikes, increasing numbers of foreign forces on Afghan soil and growing frustration with the lack of progress on economic and security fronts, Afghan popular support remains broadly in favour of international forces remaining in Afghanistan. Opinion polls show growing concerns and a slight dwindling of support, but levels of support will still continue to allow a full range of ISAF and OEF military activities as they tackle the Taliban. No significant anti-ISAF shift in mood is likely throughout 2009. However, the popular mood, as expressed through Parliament, may see increasing efforts by the Afghan government to influence, if not control, less popular aspects of ISAF's activities—in particular the use of air-power.

**Security situation**

The Taliban will face 2009 with confidence and this will have been heightened by the September–October 2008 media speculation that the campaign to rebuild Afghanistan was failing. They will be looking to inflict even greater casualties on ISAF and the Afghan government's security forces than they managed in 2008 and they will probably achieve this.

Although the insurgency will remain unable to take and hold ground, they will be able to spread their influence around many areas where ISAF and the Afghan government is unable to contest their presence. This will include less "obvious" areas where Taliban support is not normally widespread, such as in the west and north. The deployment of two or three fresh US brigades is likely in the summer. They may start to have an impact on combat operations in the south and east into autumn. This may cause some difficulty for the Taliban but we may see a rise in the number of clashes and casualties in areas where these new forces are deployed (probably in the Paktia/Khowst/Paktika area in the south east and the Konar/Nurestan area in the east where the bulk of US forces are deployed and active) as Taliban fighters attempt to rise to the challenge.

*Security Sector Reform*

In the period from the end of 2008 to the end of 2009, it is unlikely that any significant progress will be seen in any of the aspects of Afghanistan SSR (reform of the army, reform of the police, reform of the judiciary, disarmament and counter-narcotics). The possible exception to this may be the ANA, but undue attention will

be focused upon the development of the army and police forces as they increasingly come to be identified with international “exit strategies”.

The Afghan National Army will continue, over 2009, to make relative progress, although it will still struggle with manpower, recruitment and retention of personnel. Although its infantry battalions are reasonably competent (albeit routinely under strength), the crucial “force-multiplier” elements, such as reconnaissance, artillery, logistics, transport, air support, intelligence and planning will remain much less well developed.

The police will continue to be associated with poor morale, lack of capability and corruption. New US initiatives will have afforded some basic training to some police districts, but the effects will not yet have been felt. The EU police mission to Afghanistan, EUPOL, will remain broadly lacking in a coherent mission and impact. The ANP will be generally distrusted across the country. There will probably a continued downward trend in narcotics production, although poppy production will continue and remain tied to instability.<sup>30</sup> Disarmament initiatives are likely to be minimal.

*‘Warlords’ and internal power-brokers*

Political, religious and military power-brokers have always existed outside of the influence of any Afghan central government. Some, in the past and even today, act as a benign stabilising force in the absence of strong governance from Kabul. Although “warlords” as such (definitions are not clear) are generally assessed to have been brought at least loosely under control, disarmed and are now often to be found serving in government ministries (Ismail Khan, Abdul Rashid Dostum) or as provincial governors (Mohammed Atta, Gul Agha Shirzai), it is important not to under-estimate:

- a) their ability to survive throughout the shifting fortunes of Afghanistan.
- b) the regional unofficial influence they may still possess.
- c) their potential for access to finances, weapons and fighters if the situation were to rapidly destabilise.
- d) the rallying points that they may present to large sections of the population in the event of a further significant deterioration in Afghanistan’s political and security situation.
- e) the value they may still have to external backers and neighbouring countries.

Some now appear genuinely resolved to working for a prosperous and democratic Afghanistan. Many, however, will continue to adopt a pragmatic approach to developments—supporting the US and the Afghan government while it appears to be working but retaining the option to change sides if fortunes appear to be shifting. They will have communications links to numerous groups: similar power-brokers, rivals, insurgents, regional and international groups in order to maximise their options.

However, in 2009 there will be no significant political or military attempts at destabilisation by warlords. Elections, parliament and major security and political

30 ONDCP Public Affairs Office, ‘New Survey Reveals Steep Drops in Opium Production and Cultivation in Afghanistan’, *Office of National Drug Control Policy*, 24 Oct. 2008, <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/news/press08/102408.html>



developments continue to provide them opportunities to secure more influence for themselves, there is too much international involvement (including the powerful US) and the Taliban have yet to demonstrate themselves sufficiently powerful. Efforts to combine their voting bases in favour of one candidate or another will take place. In order for any Presidential candidate to get elected, deals with some of these power-brokers will be expected and made.

## 4. Five years on: 2013

*The going may be tougher before it gets easier*

US General David Petraeus, September 2008.<sup>31</sup>

### **Overview**

In November 2009, the situation in Afghanistan will be broadly recognisable to November 2008—albeit with a worsening security situation. However, the four years from the end of 2009 will see even greater challenges and uncertainties emerge. Over the period from 2009 to around 2012, some significant—and interrelated—political and military events are going to overlap in a destabilising fashion.

One thing appears likely, that most of these events will make the situation in Afghanistan more fragile and uncertain over this period and put what gains have thus far been made into jeopardy. Although overall there will of course be pockets of progress, we will not, over this period, see significant political, military or economic indicators that Afghanistan is on the right track. In fact, it looks increasingly possible that the medium term will see the conditions falling into place for a slide back towards fragmentation, whether this means a return to warlordism, a north-south divide or a return to civil war.

### **Major influences**

#### *Regional and international factors*

Neighbouring countries and the region generally will be starting to react to the likelihood of international troop withdrawals over this period. Pakistan and Iran will retain a keen interest in ISAF and US troop deployments and activities, but all neighbours will be keen to ensure and maintain the capabilities to gain information on the ground and to support and influence key groups and power-brokers that are judged to favour that their specific national agendas. There will remain concerns that Iran may be providing support to some Afghan insurgent groups. However, unless there is a significant downward shift in security conditions in Afghanistan or a negative change in Iran's relationship with the US and the international community, Iranian influence will remain a broadly positive factor on economic, reconstruction, counter-narcotics and trade levels.

The same will not be able to be said for Pakistan, whose own political instability and poor security situation will continue to allow insurgent groups to use western Pakistan (Baluchistan, the FATA and the North West Frontier Province) as a safe haven from which to regroup, train and conduct attacks. Large parts of the Pakistani military and government will continue to feel that the need for a pro-Pakistani regime in Kabul will justify retaining links with Taliban groups and individuals. This will stay an undeclared and unofficial policy and will remain a major cause of friction between the Afghan and Pakistani governments. There are no signs of any significant diplomatic or military initiatives to resolve the issue of the porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The FATA will remain ungovernable and so the insurgency in Afghanistan will continue to benefit from safe havens in Pakistan.

31 Gall, C., 'Insurgents in Afghanistan Are Gaining, Petraeus Says', quoting Petraeus talking about the insurgency, *New York Times*, 30 Sep. 2008, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/01/world/asia/01petraeus.html>

Media comment, criticism and perception will continue be crucial in shaping international, Afghan and insurgent minds regarding progress in Afghanistan and likely outcomes. At the end of 2011, a series of key 10<sup>th</sup> anniversaries will take place, based around the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Al Qa'ida's attacks on the US mainland on 11 September 2001 and the subsequent Coalition invasion of Afghanistan:

- a) 9 September 2011—10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Northern Alliance leader Ahmed Shah Massoud by Al Qa'ida suicide bombers.
- b) 11 September 2011—10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11.
- c) 7 October 2011—10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Coalition attack on the Taliban leading to the removal of the Taliban regime.
- d) Early December 2011—10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the defeat of the Taliban and holding of the Bonn Conference.
- e) Late December—10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Karzai sworn as President of the Interim Government, the arrival of ISAF troops into Kabul.

The Taliban and Al Qa'ida may well try to initiate spectacular attacks on or around these significant dates, but it is likely to be the world's media who will have a more damaging impact—reviewing, challenging, questioning and comparing promises and expectations with perceived progress. Many Western governments may feel obliged to come up with renewed commitments—but mandate renewals will still be for only one or two years. Others will come under pressure to announce some kind of “victory” in order to justify reducing troop levels and other forms of expensive and difficult commitments. Media focus on these dates will create an even stronger atmosphere of criticism, reassessment of progress, uncertainty, calls for new solutions and a hunt for people to blame.

#### *Election syndrome*

The US election will take place in November 2008, the Afghan presidential election is intended to happen in 2009 and the Afghan parliamentary elections are scheduled for 2010. Build up to these elections is and will cause distraction and uncertainty regarding the possibility of new leaderships and new strategies. At a time of growing focus on the strategy debate and the achievements of the Afghan government to date, there will be a period of hiatus, probably of several months, more likely closer to a year. A new US president is likely to oversee shifts in approach and international security forces are diverted to supporting the electoral processes in Afghanistan. Any additional troop reinforcements are likely to be similarly distracted. After the US 2012 elections, a US president may well have to face media and security issues arising from the anniversaries described above and the potential for international troop withdrawals described below.

#### *Withdrawal syndrome*

As the US looks likely to commit to a significant increase in troops in 2009–2010, several other nations are looking to withdraw forces. Some ISAF nations have already scheduled to pull out their forces—perhaps the most significant announcement being that of the Canadian intention to withdraw its military commitment.<sup>32</sup>

More nations still are likely to make similar announcements over this period. Western governments will be keen to declare the ANA and ANP fully capable as

32 ABZ/MMN, 'Harper vows to withdraw from Afghanistan', *Press TV*, 11 Sep. 2008, <<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=69085&sectionid=351020701>

soon as possible—there is a high likelihood that such declarations will be premature and not match the reality of ANSF capability on the ground. There are already indications that the Taliban are aware of the proposals and are encouraged by them.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, US military emphasis looks increasingly likely to move from Iraq to Afghanistan. For all the “Afghanistan cannot be solved by military force alone” claims by Western governments, it looks likely that, with perhaps an even greater emphasis on US power, military force will still be the main tool by which the Taliban are confronted and the government of Afghanistan supported.

### **Political situation**

The political scene in Afghanistan will be slightly more mature—the Afghan parliament will certainly be more assertive and political parties will start to take root. But the challenges noted above—elections, troop withdrawal, debates over strategy and perceptions in the media will cause much internal friction and tension. Parliament will remain dominated by factions and block votes, with self- or factional-interest dictating much of the proceedings. There will still be great potential for ill-considered, emotive and “knee jerk” interventions from Parliament on a range of subjects—matters of security, relations with Pakistan, ISAF/US operations. Afghanistan’s relations with Pakistan will probably be aided by growing trade links between the two, but still remain fractious and dominated by charges that Pakistan is at best failing to deal with the Taliban insurgents operating from FATA safe havens and, at worst, is still covertly supporting them.

Government, parliament and politics in general will still be greatly—and negatively—influenced by the “old guard”—key power brokers who emerged immediately before, during, or immediately after the Soviet invasion period—former Jihadis, warlords, ethnic and religious leaders. Over much political debate, particularly over security issues such as how to deal with the Taliban, will loom the rivalries between members of the former Northern Alliance (aka the national Front) and the Pushtuns who, to many former Northern Alliance members, represent the Taliban.

### **Security situation**

In 2008, despite reportedly many hundreds of casualties and numerous middle ranking and local commanders, the Taliban show no sign of being defeated purely by military force. Their media statements regularly refer to their intention to fight indefinitely until international forces have withdrawn, together with an understanding that the international community is already in its commitment for a long-term military deployment. It is reasonable to assume that, by 2013, a significant amount of this insurgent capability, intent and willpower will remain, although, by a process of attrition, more commanders will have been killed. Given the weakness of the Pakistani state and the ambivalence of army and government military and intelligence organs towards the Taliban, it is likely that safe havens will continue to provide support for the Taliban.

It also seems increasingly likely that some kind of contacts and extended talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government will be ongoing over the next few years. If the international community continues to show signs of war-weariness and several nations have withdrawn or stated an intention to withdraw, this may hasten

33 Deveau, S., ‘Taliban cheer Harper’s pledge to withdraw troops by 2011’, *Canwest News Service*, 15 Sep. 2008, <<http://www.canada.com/ottawacitizen/story.html?id=27c12ca8-c858-4fb3-9d4e-214c4f3e5575>>

further negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Other Afghan leaders and powerbrokers may also involve themselves – but perhaps these may unhelpfully be independent of government talks and aimed more at self-serving agendas.

Although the Taliban combat capability is likely to remain as a key influence, it may, by 2013, be possible to discern a shift of some Taliban elements towards a more political agenda. It is therefore also perhaps possible to suggest that Taliban insurgent activity may be reaching a plateau in terms of intensity and areas of operations.

#### *Security sector reform*

Reform of the security will continue to have made only patchy and slow progress by the end of 2013. The efforts to increase the size of the police and army will remain the priority and be partially successful, although recruitment will probably be slow. Counter narcotics will make some slow progress but the usual problems—corruption, lack of coordination and confusion over strategy will apply.

#### *Reform of the Defence Ministry and creation of an Afghan National Army*

The Afghan National Army will make strides in confidence and capability but risks over-confidence in terms of its ability to operate independently. Over this period, efforts will be made to increase further the size of the ANA from its current set target size of 80 000 to a new ceiling of 134 000 – a target it is, in 2008, currently scheduled to meet in 2013. Over this period there will emerge a ‘capability gap’ between the number of personnel and units created and the actual capability of these units—or parts of these units—to operate effectively.

#### *Reform of the Interior Ministry and creation of an Afghan National Police*

The Afghan National Police will continue to struggle to make basic progress. Recruits will be of poor quality and corruption and lack of capability will abound throughout the lower middle and higher ranks. The Ministry of Interior will still have many serious question marks about its capabilities and corruption levels. International community efforts will remain uncoordinated and this will damage the long term development of the police.

#### *Reform of the Judiciary*

The judicial system will remain weak at the end of 2013, a function of limited professional capabilities, the difficulties in recruiting and training and widespread corruption. Links between the police and the judiciary will remain very poor.

#### *Disarmament*

It is unlikely that formal disarmament processes will be seriously enforced between 2009 and 2013, in fact it is very possible that disarmament processes may have been both formally concluded. Disarmament initiatives during this period will be limited, despite there being numerous Illegal Armed Groups (IAG) still judged to be active in the country. In some parts of the country, the number of groups holding weapons or starting to access weapons will be on the increase.

*Counter-narcotics*

Although there are some encouraging signs that poppy cultivation has declined from 2007 to 2008, and more provinces have been declared “poppy free”, it is far too early to declare that the corner has been turned. Areas of poppy production appear to be closely linked to areas of instability and it is likely that there will be an insurgency continuing to operate in southern and eastern Afghanistan and western Pakistan. Market forces (the state of the Afghan economy, provision of viable alternative livelihoods and the global demand for narcotics) will continue to determine, on a year to year basis, whether provinces will see increases or decreases in narcotic cultivation, processing or trafficking. In previous years, decreases in production have been heralded only to see the reversal of the trend the following year.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Patience, M., ‘UN reports Afghan opium decline’, *BBC News*, 26 Aug. 2008, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7582018.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7582018.stm)

## 5. Ten years on: 2018

*Unfortunately, alongside these positive factors are a number of negative ones as well, and they have the potential to outweigh the positive.*

William Maley, June 2006.<sup>35</sup>

### Overview

In the process of researching this paper, it very quickly becomes clear that ten years is actually not a very long period of time. Particularly in the context of a country that has known over thirty years of various forms of conflict and is consequently trying to rebuild itself from an exceptionally limited economic and financial base. It is likely that all the key themes of 2008 will be clearly recognisable in 2018. Thus, in 2018, there will be ongoing debates in Afghanistan and within the international community concerning the issues of insurgency (and a generally poor security situation), warlords, corruption, narcotics, weak central governance, poorly co-ordinated international community assistance, problematic and contradictory strategies and the often very malign interference and impact of neighbouring countries.

Perhaps the three key and interlinked determinants of Afghanistan future are the capabilities and intentions of the insurgency, the direction of Pakistan's influence and the commitment of the international community. If this is the case, then the most important one by far is the role and support of the international community. Most important within this, is not so much the actual support given, but the *perceived* support being provided. It is useful again to quote Afghan expert William Maley in large part:

...large numbers of people are not driven by ideology but by a desire to survive or prosper on a day-to-day basis. To varying degrees they are watching all the time to see which way the wind is blowing, and they will adjust their own behaviour, and realign themselves politically, accordingly... Thus if the sense begins to develop among some people that international interest is fading and that the Coalition's commitment to support the [Afghan] government is on the wane, the government's problems could rapidly multiply as that sense starts to spread... the question remains whether the [international] commitment is sufficient in its scale, character and symbolic significance to put paid to the danger that Afghanistan might drift towards something like the situation in the critical provinces of Iraq.<sup>36</sup>

From a Western perspective, the situation in Afghanistan in 2018 will probably be much more of a messy and unpleasant compromise than is contemplated now. Some warlords will have returned and reverted to past practises. Freedom of the press will be limited. Human rights issues will have taken a backward step, with many Taliban values regaining their 1990s levels of prominence.

There will, of course, be some progress—the political scene will be more mature in some ways, having got, by 2018, at least six electoral processes (presidential and parliamentary) under its belt—and the economy will be improving. Most initiatives on security, corruption, counter narcotics, the economy, etc, will be conceived and led by the Afghan government, albeit dependent upon support from the international community. Expectations will at least be a little more realistic about what can and cannot be achieved. But overall, the fragility of the political and security situation will be substantial and the corresponding risk of a new fragmentation will be great.

<sup>35</sup> Maley, W., *Rescuing Afghanistan* (C. Hurst & Co: London, 2006), p. 127.

<sup>36</sup> Maley (note 35), pp. 130–133.

Skepticism regarding what the international community can and will do to help Afghanistan will be high. Optimism for future prospects across the country will be low.

The overall situation is likely to be a similar, but less intensive, version of mid-1990s Afghanistan—perhaps a 'civil war-lite'. The UN and the international community will be attempting to provide support for a central government that is increasingly divided by personal, local and factional politics. The scale of international commitment, both financially and militarily, will be significantly reduced. Much of this will be as a result of downsizing and withdrawal of international troops around 2010–2014. Several, perhaps brigade-level, international units—dominated (and probably commanded overall by the US)—will remain and operate in the south, southeast and east. Their main role will be an OEF-style anti-terrorist (i.e. Al Qa'ida) mission, with a secondary training and mentoring role for the ANSF. They will regularly clash with hostile Pushtun elements (either pro-Taliban or former Taliban) who remain unreconciled with the government in Kabul and strongly opposed to the presence of international (in particular US) forces inside Afghanistan.

### **Major influences**

#### *The Taliban*

The Taliban will continue to be a significant presence in the region, militarily and, increasingly, politically. The definition of “Taliban” will remain as difficult to pin down in 2018 as it is in 2008, comprising, as this loose movements does, of several layers of supporters, fighters and activists across the Pushtun tribal areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan all with varying levels of loyalty and commitment. The Taliban will probably be less associated with Al Qa'ida and international terrorism and more with Pushtun rights. They will still be attempting, with some success, to enforce their own version of Sharia law onto Afghan society.

Some elements of the Taliban will move towards a more pragmatic but very pro-Pushtun political agenda. This does not necessarily herald a major split, but increasingly it will be necessary to talk about “pro” Taliban, “moderate” Taliban, “former” Taliban and just plain “Taliban” groupings. The distinctions and linkages between all these groupings will be opaque, but pro-Taliban and anti-Taliban tribes will be identifiable.

#### *Regional and international factors*

The role of the international community—the UN, NGOs, aid agencies, financial assistance, training, advice and military support will still in 2018 be crucial to Afghan development. However, a perception that the international community is losing, or has lost, interest will contribute to the encouragement of more malign influences.

It is likely that international commitment overall will be conducted more at a distance. Assistance will be less focused on military aspects, aside for financial contributions to paying ANSF salaries. The main effort will be on financial aid and reconstruction projects—which will still be greatly needed—and funding for training and salaries of key government institutions.

On the assumption that Pakistan's own political and security situation will be relatively unstable, Pakistan will continue to exert an overall negative influence on Afghanistan's development. This may be less through deliberate policies of interference and more through the continuing difficulties in bringing stability,



political reform and economic development to the Tribal Areas, large parts of Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Provinces more generally.

However, Pakistani government, military and intelligence assets, often in the guise of “former” or “retired” soldiers and officers will continue to be used to provide guidance, support, provision of weapons and training for Taliban, pro-Taliban or Pushtun groups. Increasingly there will be a political dimension to the guidance offered. Most, if not all of this work will be covert and intended to be “deniable”.

From the Iranian perspective, an unstable Afghanistan will be a major cause of concern. If the Iranian government senses that the situation is spiralling out of control, then it will revert back to more proactive efforts to secure influence with key power brokers, warlords and ethnic or religious groups. Such attempts will include provision of funding, political and economic backing. All this may weaken the ties of some provinces to Kabul governance. Weapons may also form part of this exchange, dependent upon the security situation. Western Afghanistan, in particular Herat province, the central highlands where the entirely Shia Hazara ethnic faction predominate, and the major urban areas that include significant Shia minorities (Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif) will form the main constituencies for Iranian interest. Attempts to secure influence with key members of Parliament will also be made.

### **Political situation**

The political scene will be slightly more mature, having had, by 2018, at least six electoral processes under its belt. However, these “electoral process” may start to resemble less the Western style democratic secret ballot systems and move more towards the Jirga/Shura processes. There is scope for the constitution to be amended and many factions will have an interest in revising the manner by which political, military and financial power is distributed.

There will be a younger generation of politicians slowly (and painfully) starting to emerge, less influenced and less coloured in their world view by the “old days” of the anti-Soviet Jihad, the civil war and the rise of the Taliban. They will have a more sophisticated understanding of the wider world and a more realistic view of the problems within Afghanistan and what the international community is capable of providing by way of assistance.

However, although some will have died, or otherwise retired from the scene, the former Jihadis, warlords, ethnic and religious figures from these old days will still dominate the political and military scene. Government and Parliament will still be dominated by personal, local ethnic and factional agendas at the expense of coherent progress in developing the country.

### **Security situation**

If the Taliban do not have a major role in some form of compromise government they will at least heavily influence large parts of the south, southeast and east of Afghanistan. Political and military factions will vie for influence in across the country and other parts of the country will still be beyond the reach of central government. As a result, aid agencies will be struggling with the usual problems of providing assistance in areas prone to criminality, lack of security generally and corrupt security forces.

There will probably still be an international military presence with combat capability in Afghanistan, although most European military forces will have left, or have been significantly scaled down. Emphasis will be on trainers, mentors and

advisors to ANSF. The US and UK may still have a more actively counter-insurgency presence in the south and east of the country.

### *Security Sector Reform*

Most of the difficulties highlighted in the 2009 and 2013 projections will still apply regarding the likely condition of security sector reform. Security Sector Reform as a “catch all” title will not be so relevant in 2018. Attention will be focused on the role and capabilities of the army and police, although cultural and structural reform of the defence and interior ministries will be equally important.

ANA and ANP will still require major financial support from the US and wider international community as they will probably both be around double the manpower size of their 2008 strength (as at April 2008 the ANA had 57 800 personnel and the ANP had 79 910). The ANA will be almost entirely equipped with US weapons, vehicles and communications systems. The ANP will be moving in that direction. The very costly ANSF salary, equipment and maintenance bill will not be sustainable by the Afghan government alone.

The character, training, operations and “raison d’être” of the ANSF will still be focused upon counter-insurgency activities. The ANA will still be broadly intact and broadly respected by the population, although it will suffer from morale and retention problems. The ANP will still suffer major recruitment, retention and corruption problems. This will undermine popular support for it. Instances of police unit complicity in illegal checkpoints, narcotics smuggling and taking bribes will still be commonplace.

The narcotics industry will still be a major problem, as will its partner issue, alternative livelihoods, although there will be some cause for optimism. Multiple provinces will by this stage be broadly free of regular poppy harvesting. Drug money will still fund a range of negative influences on Afghanistan’s progress—a large illegal economy, weapons for insurgents and criminals and political decision-making practises at district, province and national capital levels.

## 6. The insurgency

### Origins

The Taliban movement originated in the refugee camps populated by Afghans (in particular Pushtuns) displaced during the Soviet invasion. It coalesced around disillusioned former mujahideen and Pushtun youth fired up with an extreme vision of Islam gained in the madrassas of Pakistan which for many of them served as a surrogate for parents and a provider of the only education they had ever had. The madrassas functioned as a cross between a school, hostel and a religious centres for children and young men who had known nothing but war and displacement.

After the initial optimism following the defeat of the Soviet Army and the subsequent downfall of the Soviet puppet regime of President Sayid Mohammed Najibullah in 1992, the various victorious mujahedin groups began fighting amongst themselves. These Taliban (literally 'religious students'), angered by the corruption and self-interest of Afghan warlords, promised a pure and fair interpretation of Islam that aimed to return the country to the days of the Prophet Muhammad. This struck a chord with the warlord-weary Pushtun populace, most of whom craved only some semblance of law and order. Supported militarily and financially by Pakistan, who saw in the Taliban a means of influencing the region, successful Taliban reprisals against corrupt local Pashtun warlords created a 'bandwagon' of pro-Taliban support in the south of the country. Many pragmatic Pashtun tribal leaders and even warlords from other ethnic groups chose to be swept up in this popular movement, judging it safer to join the Taliban rather than fight them.

In essence, the initial Taliban world view was shaped by a combination of 'limiting' factors: limited access to media, education, ideas of governance and conflict resolution, limited access to other countries and limited tolerance of people of different religious or cultural backgrounds. Since their removal from power, the initially "anti-modern" Taliban have recognized that modern technology and media can be useful for their insurgency. If the Taliban movement is now expanding its horizons, it is through the prisms of al-Qaeda, the insurgency in Iraq and a more extreme strain of "Taliban" in the form of what Ahmed Rashid identifies as Pakistani Taliban.<sup>37</sup> Although the insurgency is still conducted in a typically Afghan style (suicide bombing being the notable exception), some Taliban are starting to perceive and portray themselves as part of a 'global jihad'.

It is important to remember that when the US-led Coalition and the Northern Alliance forces joined together to overthrow the Taliban militarily, in October 2001, the Taliban were, broadly speaking, a recognisably conventional force, making use of armour, artillery and even air power. They relied upon extensive use of Sports Utility Vehicles (SUV), liberally provided by Pakistani and Middle Eastern backers, for their often highly mobile campaigns around the Ring Road and the use of fortified and trench positions as advances came to a halt. However, with extremely weak logistics, planning and supply capabilities, combined with some very questionable loyalties of some of their Afghan allies, they were unable to resist a coordinated assault on their forces from a superpower and all the military and financial assets at its disposal.

With the collapse of their front lines, the speed of the capture or destruction of most of their military hardware and the defection of many of their forces, the Taliban, in its incarnation as a conventional force, had nowhere to go. Its fighters dispersed and the

<sup>37</sup> Rashid, A., *Descent into chaos* (Penguin Group: London, 2008)

leadership likewise. Many returned to the Pushtun areas of the south, south east and east. Others chose to retire to Pakistan and await developments.

*Evolution of the insurgency*

What, in 2008, we now see as an effective insurgency was, in 2002-2003 a fragmented and incoherent movement. The speed of the Taliban's defeat had left them demoralised and there was perhaps even uncertainty as to their future in Pakistan given Musharraf's public siding with the US in the "War on Terror". If there was a significant opportunity to engage with the Taliban and bring them into the political arena it was probably then.

At that stage, there were perhaps three or four main nuclei of the insurgency that we now still recognise. In 2002, all were focused on survival rather than taking a jihad forward to the foreign invaders:

a) The Taliban comprised a core leadership group of Mullah Omar and battlefield commanders and political chiefs such as Dadullah, Osmani, Jalaluddin Haqqani and Berader. They were probably mainly located in and around Quetta and Peshawar—the Taliban leadership soon became known as the "Quetta Shura".

b) Hezb-I Islami fighters loyal to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar formed associations with the Taliban over this period as well, aided by Iran permitting Hekmatyar to leave exile in Iran and move to Pakistan. Hekmatyar's faction of Hezb-i Islami retained fragments of support across the country, but the main base of support was in the east—Konar, Nangahar and Nurestan.

c) Many, if not most, of the foot soldiers had dispersed to their homes in the Pushtun belt on both sides of the border. Their Taliban sympathies remained broadly intact, being very close to many Pushtun tribal values. They awaited developments and leadership.

d) There were additionally numerous Al Qa'ida-associated "foreign fighters"—Chechens, Uzbeks, Somalis, Arabs also seeking refuge in the North West Frontier Provinces.

These groups slowly regained strength and confidence between 2002 and 2005, primarily because they were allowed to regroup in the relative safe haven of the Pakistani Tribal Areas and, as they attempted to move back into Afghanistan they found that the Afghan government reach into the provinces was extremely weak. However, there was uncertainty as to the direction they would follow. There were talks of "moderate" Taliban and of divisions between factions. Several "splinter" groups appeared and disappeared—often little more than a name. It seemed that Mullah Dadullah, one of their more effective fighters, was several times on the brink of leaving the movement.<sup>38</sup> It was (and still is) unclear the extent to which Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was working in support of the Taliban or in support of his own agenda. Clearly there were differences within the movement and old rivalries, tribal and factional were perhaps being played out.

Although there was undoubtedly a significant dip in Taliban morale at the end of 2004 when the Afghan Presidential elections took place amidst almost country-wide

38 Van Der Schriek, D., 'What is being referred to as the Taliban or neo-Taliban today does not only consist of Taliban remnants proper...Al-Qaeda members are also part of this category, as are mujahideen belonging to the two Hezb-e-Islami factions...an organization called Saif ul-Muslimeen (Sword of Muslims) constitutes another insurgent force in today's Afghanistan.', 'New Terrorist Trends in Afghanistan', 18 Nov. 2004, <<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2368887>

support for the political process, insurgency activity, capability and confidence has gradually increased each year. Taliban operations have tended to take place in areas where there are Pushtun tribes, where they still retained a certain amount of support and could benefit from commonality of language, culture and interest. The south (the provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Zabol and Oruzgan), south east (Paktia, Khowst and Paktika) and the east (Konar, Nurestan and Nangarhar) have seen by far the bulk of insurgency operations and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Northern Afghanistan will continue to resist significant Taliban expansion, lacking the large base of sympathetic Pushtuns and easy access to a Pakistani safe haven. Historically, however, it was not uncommon for northern warlords to switch sides during the 1990s and join the Taliban for short term tactical gain.

### *Reasons for the growth of the insurgency*

There are several reasons for the persistency—and indeed growth—of the insurgency and these factors have also been instrumental in shaping strategy and tactics:

(a) a historically strong tribal gun culture and rejection of external control and foreigners;<sup>39</sup> (b) a large base of residual ‘folk’ experience of guerilla fighting against the Soviets; (c) a unifying motivation in Islam, compatible with Pashtun tribal values; (d) a ‘safe haven’ in Pakistan’s tribal areas from which to regroup and reorganize; (e) a pool of recruits from Pashtun and refugee groups on both sides of the Afghan–Pakistani border; (f) inspiration (and practical knowledge gained) from the insurgency in Iraq; and (g) the Afghan regime’s inability to achieve visibility in the key southern and eastern provinces—let alone project its influence and provide governance.

Although the term “resurgent Taliban” has unhelpfully been around in media and government analytical circles since at least 2003, the biggest step forward for the Taliban came in 2006, with their decision to directly challenge the British army deployment to Helmand. It was in Helmand that it became apparent just how extensively the Taliban had been able to infiltrate themselves back into Pushtun tribal life at the village and district level and just how weak (and, in the case of the Afghan National Police, how corrupt) the influence of the Afghan government was.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Taliban’s goals and strategy**

The Taliban’s ultimate goal is to achieve a fundamentalist Islamic state under Sharia law and to eject foreign influence. Mullah Omar was quoted in 2007 as saying: ‘foreign troops should leave Afghanistan and then the institutions they created should be dismantled.’<sup>41</sup> This goal has stayed consistent. Their chosen strategy is to revert to an insurgency campaign with many strategic, operational and tactical similarities to the highly effective “Jihad”, the mujahideen insurgency campaign against the Soviets in the 1980s.

39 ‘The Pathan—of whatever tribe—has a strong pride in being a Pathan. The tribal group is the limit of the extent to which the Pathan is prepared to abate his jealously guarded individualism. . . . To the world outside his tribal group . . . the Pathan’s attitude alternates between a total indifference and a kind of tigerish contempt for the rest of the human animal kingdom . . . all this makes the Pathan a man to be liked and respected, to be treated tactfully and carefully; and a man rarely, if ever, to be organised within the impersonal conventions of a modern state’. Griffiths, J., *Afghanistan* (Pall Mall Press: London, 1967), p. 61.

40 Coghlan, T., ‘Weak government allows Taleban to prosper in Afghanistan: The collapse of security in Helmand owes as much to government failings as to any military action’, *The Times*, 29 Sep. 2008, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article4842499.ece>

41 Khan, I., ‘Omar threatens to intensify war: Talks with Karzai govt ruled out’, *Dawn*, 4 Jan. 2007, <http://www.dawn.com/2007/01/04/top4.htm>

Military operations against foreign and Afghan government and military targets are the priority, apparently at the expense of any significant political initiatives. The Afghan government and the Taliban leadership will have been in almost continual contact. However, with the Taliban's perception since 2006 that they are in the ascendancy, significant talks between the two that might move the Taliban into the political arena or at least bring a lessening of insurgent attacks are unlikely in the short to medium term.

The Taliban strategy is and will remain to attack the resolve of the international community and the Afghan government through the use of violence, intimidation, threats and propaganda activities, thereby undermining the Afghan government and demonstrating the growing presence and capabilities of Taliban forces. They will seek to achieve this, not necessarily by taking and holding ground (although this can and does temporarily take place) but by inflicting casualties upon ISAF and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF—essentially the army and the police forces), as well as targeting infrastructure, institutions and personalities.<sup>42</sup> Maintaining visible pressure in and around Kandahar and Kabul will be important for the Taliban. Taliban operations will attempt—and have some success—to push ever closer to Kabul along key transport routes such as the ring road coming into Kabul from Ghazni to the south west and from along the Sarobi-Jalalabad route to the east.

Taliban propaganda activities have played an important part in shaping perception and support. Their efforts are becoming more effective each year. A developing combination of “Hearts and Minds”, information operations and propaganda activities will continue to undermine the resolve of the population. It may not secure direct support for the Taliban, might see a gradual withholding of support and disengagement of the populace for the Afghan government as increasing numbers choose to sit on the fence and await developments.<sup>43</sup>

Safe havens in Pakistan continue to provide the opportunity—as they did in the 1980s—insurgents to regroup, rest, train, rearm and prepare for further operations. The Tribal Areas in Pakistan will likely play host to numerous local and foreign insurgent groups for several decades to come.

### **The role of Pakistan**

Pakistan plays out its fears and concerns about India in Afghanistan. It has sought to establish a pro-Pakistan regime in Kabul to give Pakistan “strategic depth”. The Pakistani military and intelligence (ISI) support for the Taliban during the 1990s is well-documented.<sup>44</sup> President Musharraf was forced to make a 180 degree change in direction against the Taliban after 9/11 although it is highly unlikely that ISI support automatically ended—many ISI officers had been working with the same Pushtun fighters since the Soviet invasion. Rumours and allegations of Pakistani complicity in supporting the Taliban—or at least doing little to interdict their operations—abound. In September 2008, a US Colonel claimed that Pakistani helicopters had been resupplying Taliban fighters during battles in June 2007 with American forces in Nangarhar province.<sup>45</sup>

42 Nelson, Soraya, S., ‘Taliban’s shifting tactics define Afghanistan conflict’, *NPR*, 4 Mar. 2008, quoting Nathan, J, of the International Crisis Group, “[The Taliban] are not going to overrun Kabul anytime soon, but they hope to just create a general air of instability and wear the other side out.”  
<<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=87863445>

43 Foxley, T., ‘The Taliban’s propaganda activities: how well is the Afghan insurgency communicating and what is it saying?’ *SIPRI Project Paper*, June 2007, <<http://www.sipri.org/contents/conflict/foxleytaliban>

44 Rashid, A., *Descent into chaos* (Penguin Group: London, 2008), pp. 77-79.

45 Naylor, Sean D., ‘US Officer: Pakistani forces aided Taliban’, *Defense News*, 19 Sept. 2008, “Pakistani military forces flew repeated helicopter missions into Afghanistan to resupply the Taliban during a fierce battle in June 2007,

Pakistan provides a safe haven for insurgent groups and will continue to do so, whether this is endorsed by the Pakistani government or not. Civilian governments in Pakistan have struggled—and by and large failed—to gain control over the army and intelligence services. It is likely that elements, or former elements of the Pakistani government, military or intelligence arms are giving and will continue to give support to some insurgent groups. From their perspective, it will remain important for Pakistan to be able to work with and influence regional groups such as the Taliban who are likely to be around long after the international community interest has faded. This may in the form of training, funding or provision of weapons and equipment.

### **Taliban tactics and equipment**

The legacy and experience gained from the anti-Soviet Jihad looms large over Taliban tactical operations—assassinations, long-range use of inaccurate rockets, mines and other Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) and ambushes along key supply and access routes are standard. These are generally conducted by relatively small groups of fighters (perhaps from five to fifty). Fighters infiltrate through known smuggling or old 1980s Jihad routes from Pakistan although sometimes they will base themselves in and around Afghan villages on a semi-permanent basis, on occasion constructing fighting positions, trenches and other similar infantry positions.

Former Soviet equipment—small arms and light support weapons such as Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG), light and medium machine guns, light mortars and 105mm and 122mm rockets—are still the “stock in trade” of the Taliban fighter because of their ready availability, cheapness and ease of use.

Attacks usually come in a range between assassination attempts by two men on a motorcycle to more set piece “complex” ambushes, in which attacks are conducted from multiple directions. The latter are becoming more common and more effective and reportedly can involve over a hundred fighters. In 2003 and 2004 the Taliban became somewhat over confident and attempted to conduct larger-scale attacks—groups of 50–200 fighters, but they were routinely caught by US airpower and they suffered many losses. In 2008 it seems they have learnt many lessons and are more careful in choosing the time and place of their attacks and being aware of how long it takes for ISAF and Coalition air support to arrive on the scene.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps in the absence of anti-aircraft missile systems, it is interesting to note that Taliban propaganda activities are increasingly focusing on Afghan civilian deaths caused by ISAF and US airpower—probably a recognition that the international forces will be forced to limit use of air-strikes if the political pressure gets too great:

...once again the leadership council of Islamic Emirate makes a request to different organisations of common people, tribal elders and independent journalists to investigate the people who are involved in the butchering of thousands and thousands of innocent Afghans, and after carrying out a comprehensive non-bias investigation they should share their findings with the world, so that the whole world could see and identify who the real terrorists are...<sup>47</sup>

according to a U.S. Marine lieutenant colonel, who says his information is based on multiple U.S. and Afghan intelligence reports.”, <<http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=3733901>

46 Burgess, L., ‘Tactics used by insurgents in Afghanistan are becoming more complex’, *Stars and Stripes*, 25 June 2008, <<http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=62991&archive=true>

47 Website hosting Taliban statements: ‘The declaration of leadership council of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan about setting up an independent investigation team on the killing of civilians’, 20 May 2008, <<http://www.theunjustmedia.com/Afghanistan/Statements/may08/setting%20up%20an%20independent%20investigation%20team%20on%20the%20killing%20of%20civilians.htm>

*The Improvised Explosive Device—a weapon of strategic influence*

The evolution of IED technology and their proliferation will continue to provide a quick, cheap and effective way for the insurgents to target ISAF and Afghan security forces:

The IED is effective for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it's a cheap, easy way to inflict casualties on a fighting force whose home front and officer corps is casualty-averse. Second, it's a great way—when placed in a populated area—to draw a disproportionate response from the targeted patrol...And third, it's a low-tech weapon that frustrates a military that wants technical, high-tech solutions...even if you don't kill any Americans, you can post your video on the internet anyway (claiming that you killed two, or a dozen, or twenty) and radicalize and inspire others. It's viral warfare...<sup>48</sup>

The threat of use will put large areas of the country either out of bounds completely or only accessible with properly equipped vehicles. Key supply and access routes can also be threatened with ease, greatly hindering movement and resupply. Often, the most effective way to resupply isolated outposts will be by helicopter—which exposes another vital asset to attack. IEDs are likely to become more powerful and harder to detect.<sup>49</sup> The Brookings 'Afghanistan Index', quoting icasualties.org, notes that the main cause of death (27 per cent of soldiers killed) for US troops in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2008 is from an IED strike.<sup>50</sup> They will continue to be a major threat to ISAF troops.

*Ground operations*

The increasing confidence and capability of the Taliban may also suggest a return to more conventional ground attacks. There were successful ground attacks against French (ten French soldiers killed) and American forces (nine US soldiers killed) in the second half of 2008.<sup>51</sup> One was apparently a well-prepared and well-executed ambush, the other an attempt to rush and overwhelm an isolated outpost. Surprise attacks on small forts were characteristic of Mujahideen operations against the Soviets.

The scale of losses inflicted on ISAF forces in these thus far infrequent incidents may point the way to renewed attempts along these lines. The Taliban are likely to judge that the propaganda value of overrunning a small ISAF or OEF base would be well worth the losses suffered. They may increasingly be used to target domestic audiences in Europe and America. The predominantly mountainous and wooded terrain in the eastern provinces would appear to be the most favourable region for such tactics although international forces judged less capable than US or UK forces may deliberately be chosen instead, in order to maximise the propaganda value.<sup>52</sup>

48 Counter insurgency blog. 'The IED', *Abu Muqawama*, 30 Sep. 2008, <<http://abumuqawama.blogspot.com/2007/09/ied.html>>

49 Hambling, D, 'Is Iran Behind Afghanistan's "Superbombs"?', 25 June 2008, *Wired Blog Network*, <<http://blog.wired.com/defense/2008/06/iranian-super-1.html>>

50 Campbell, J., Shapiro, J., 'Afghanistan Index', *Brookings*, 23 Sep. 2008, <<http://www.brookings.edu/foreign-policy/afghanistan-index.aspx>>

51 Burke, J., 'Ten French soldiers killed in Afghanistan as Taliban attacks grow more audacious', *The Guardian*, 20 Aug. 2008, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/aug/20/afghanistan.france>>, and Coghlan, T., 'Nine US soldiers killed in Afghanistan as Taleban attacks base', *The Times*, 14 July 2008, <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article4326321.ece>>

52 Koelbl, S., and Yousafzai, S., 'What's important is to kill Germans', *Spiegel Online*, 21 May 2008, <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,554545,00.html>>



*Suicide bombing*

Although not a tactic previously associated with Afghanistan, the use of suicide bombers has grown into a serious concern since the end of 2005 (five suicide bomb attacks were counted between 2001 and 2005, leaping to 123 in 2006 and 160 in 2007).<sup>53</sup> Although many of the early efforts were poor (often, the would-be bomber would only manage to kill himself) the suicide bomber has become a very effective way of penetrating cities and spreading fear and uncertainty. Training of bombers appears to be getting better, judging by the increasing effectiveness, in sheer body count terms. In August 2008, the first example of a coordinated wave of suicide bombers was recorded, as the Taliban attempted to storm an American base. Such attacks—within increasing confidence, complexity and effectiveness, will remain a feature of Afghanistan for the next ten years.

*Taliban propaganda activities*

A developing combination of Hearts and Minds, information operations and propaganda activities will continue to undermine the resolve of the population and the international community. The Taliban are increasingly learning how to play on the concerns of the international community. They may not always secure direct support for the Taliban and their contradictions and lack of consideration for Afghanistan's political and economic future make them vulnerable in this arena. However, they are becoming effective in creating a gradual withholding of support for government and causing disengagement of the populace as increasing numbers choose to sit on the fence and await developments.

**The influence of al-Qaeda and foreign fighters: an insurgency surge to come?**

The widely reported influence of foreign fighters and al-Qaeda in western Pakistan will continue to give support to the Taliban insurgency inside Afghanistan. Estimates of the numbers of fighters range from the high hundreds into the thousands and are believed to encompass Chechens, Arabs, Somalis, Uzbeks and many other groups. Some have settled into tribal life in the area and have been there for many years. They appear to be an important, but not decisive, element of the Taliban insurgency effort and there is considerable uncertainty over the command and control arrangements between the Taliban, al-Qaeda and some foreign fighter groups.

Although the relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaeda will remain unclear, with the Taliban very regionally focused as opposed to the global interests of al-Qaeda, there certainly remains a very strong commonality of interest. It is likely that assistance – information, weapons, weapons technology, funding and other resources are being and will continue to be exchanged between the two groups. Unless the Tribal areas and other parts of western Pakistan come under the control of government and the military, (which is unlikely, even in a ten year time frame) this trend of external assistance is likely to remain.

There have been numerous reports since 2003 suggesting that the insurgency in Iraq has providing both practical and moral support to the Taliban, in terms of training, the exchange of tactics, techniques and technology of insurgency warfare.<sup>54</sup> Most recently, however, it seems as if the likely shift in US military emphasis from

53 Centre for American Progress, 18 July 2008, <[http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/07/afghanistan\\_numbers.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/07/afghanistan_numbers.html)

54 Coghlan, T., 'Taliban turn to Iraq-style tactics to take Kabul districts', 27 May 2008, *The Daily telegraph*, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/2032876/Taliban-turn-to-Iraq-style-tactics-to-take-Kabul-districts.html>

Iraq to Afghanistan may see a corresponding similar transfer of effort from jihadi fighters.

Afghanistan is replacing Iraq as the destination of choice for international jihadists, Western intelligence agencies claim. Analysts have monitored a surge in online recruitment of “lions of Islam” to join the war in Afghanistan through jihadist websites, particularly in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Chechnya and Turkey, in the past year...That is now being matched by evidence of an increase in foreign fighters entering Afghanistan, mostly from training bases established in the lawless Federally Administered Tribal Areas.<sup>55</sup>

### **Talks with the Taliban: reconciliation or capitulation?**

More recently, the international community and the Afghan government have given confusing and fluid signals regarding whether they are prepared to talk to the Taliban and what should be discussed. The dilemma is summed up nicely by an anonymous Kabul analyst in 2007, quoted in *The Independent*:

There's a division in the Afghan government on the extent of peace talks, who to talk peace with and when to talk. There's no cohesive view on the part of the Afghan government or among the international community.<sup>56</sup>

A key dilemma remains that status of senior Taliban officials in the eyes of the UN and the US—in particular whether the US will be prepared to negotiate with people they officially see as terrorists. In addition, with the increasing confidence and capability of the insurgency since 2006, the actual purpose of talks appears to be subtly shifting from the initial intent of reconciling with a beaten force to striking some form of political power-sharing deal.

Hamid Karzai, having actually been part of the Taliban in the early days, probably understands them better than most and he remains open in his desire to bring as many Taliban into mainstream Afghan political life as possible. The Afghan government runs a programme, aimed precisely at this goal, reportedly bringing in several thousand low level Taliban and Hezb-i Islami fighters who, in exchange for renouncing terrorism and pledging support to the new Afghan constitution, are permitted to safely return to their homes in Afghanistan. In an emotional outburst following a suicide bomb in Kabul that killed 30, Karzai offered to speak face to face with Mullah Omar and Hekmatyar in order to try and prevent further bloodshed.<sup>57</sup>

However, there is confusion over who is authorised to talk to the Taliban. In 2006 UK forces in Helmand struck the now notorious “Musa Qala deal”, in effective agreeing to leave the Helmand provincial town of Musa Qala alone as long as the Taliban did not cause any trouble. The British “colonial” approach of striking pragmatic deals with opponents differs substantially from the US and caused some friction in the UK/US relationship at the time. In December 2007, Michael Semple, who was then acting head of the EU mission, and Mervin Patterson, a senior UN

<sup>55</sup> Coghlan, T., 'Afghanistan's 'pristine jihad' draws in outsiders trained in Pakistan'. 21 July 2008, [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle\\_east/article4368820.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article4368820.ece)

<sup>56</sup> Starkey, J., 'Diplomats to leave Afghanistan as new 'Great Game' played with tribal leaders', *The Independent*, 27 Dec. 2008, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/diplomats-to-leave-afghanistan-as-new-great-game-played-with-tribal-leaders-766860.html>

<sup>57</sup> CTV.ca News Staff, 'Karzai offers government office to Taliban', *CTV.ca*, Karzai quoted as saying: “If a group of Taliban militants came to Karzai and offered to halt attacks in exchange for a role in government, he would accept”, 29 Sep. 2007, <[http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20070929/karzai\\_taliban\\_070929/20070929?hub=TopStories](http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20070929/karzai_taliban_070929/20070929?hub=TopStories)

official in Kabul, were expelled from the Afghanistan by the Afghan government amidst accusations that they might have been talking to the Taliban in and around Musa Qala.

Although non-Pushtun members of the Afghan political opposition, in particular from the former Northern Alliance, are uneasy about the prospects for striking deals with the Taliban, in a surprise move, former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, one of the key members of the Northern Alliance announced that the opposition were in fact conducting talks of their own with the Taliban.<sup>58</sup> This was apparently welcomed by Karzai and, most recently, Karzai has reportedly himself been approaching the Saudi government to assist with talks with the Taliban.<sup>59</sup>

## Prospects

The issue of some form of political or peace deal with the Taliban remains complex and emotive. There is real potential for Karzai and the Afghan government to secure a deal with Mullah Omar and other Taliban representatives—even against the wishes of the US, the international community and large parts of the political opposition.<sup>60</sup> The dilemmas of who to talk to and what to say will remain. What ought to be a slight concern is that members of the political opposition also appear to be engaged in talks – the motives and agenda can only be speculated upon.

However, the real gains still being made by the Taliban in purely military terms and the perception created in the media that the international community are desperate to talk make meaningful progress unlikely in the short and probably medium term—put bluntly, there is little incentive for the Taliban to talk at the moment. If they do talk, it will be on condition that their terms are met. Mullah Omar's statement from January 2007 continues to offer perhaps the clearest expression of Taliban desires: '...foreign troops should leave Afghanistan and then the institutions that they created should be dismantled.'<sup>61</sup>

## The future for the Taliban

### *Short/medium term*

2009 will see a confident Taliban keen to build on, from their perspective, the successes of 2006-2008. They are increasingly recognising and understanding the impact of international military casualties on the morale and resolve, not so much of international governments, but of domestic audiences in Europe, Canada and America. Suicide attacks will remain a key weapon and they will employ these to some effect across the country, particularly in the south, south east and east, as well as the capital Kabul.

Targets will include international military forces, Afghan security forces—the police in particular are likely to continue to suffer disproportionate casualties—Western NGOs and aid workers, Afghan tribal and leaders and other key power brokers. Attacks on the key personalities and organs of government in Kabul and

58 Straziuso, J., 'Afghan opposition says it's been talking to Taliban', 16 Apr. 2008, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/04/16/afghan-opposition-says-it\\_n\\_96943.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/04/16/afghan-opposition-says-it_n_96943.html)

59 Burns, John F., 'As the Afghan war intensifies and American commanders call for increased troop levels, President Hamid Karzai said Tuesday that he had repeatedly sought the intervention of the Saudi royal family to bring the resurgent Taliban to peace negotiations.', *New York Times*, 30 Sep. 2008, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/01/world/asia/01afghan.html?hp>

60 Associated Press, 'Afghan president offers Taliban a place in government for peace deal', *International Herald Tribune*, 29 Sep. 2008, <http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2007/09/29/asia/AS-GEN-Afghan-Taliban-Talks.php>

61 Khan, I., 'Omar threatens to intensify war: Talks with Karzai govt ruled out', *Dawn*, 4 Jan. 2007, <<http://www.dawn.com/2007/01/04/top4.htm>

other urban and regional centres will also form a key platform of Taliban strategy in 2009. One remaining concern that has not yet manifested itself is whether insurgent groups will access and attempt to use Surface to Air Missiles (SAM) such as the US-made Stinger or, more likely one of many Soviet/Russian systems, or copies of systems such as the SA-7, 14, 16 and 18. A successful strike on a civilian or military aircraft coming in to land at Kabul International Airport would be the strongest statement possible that the Taliban are able to influence events in Afghanistan at a strategic level. It is highly likely that insurgent groups are attempting to acquire such systems, the threat of use alone, could send shock waves through the international community in Afghanistan. The conclusion must surely be that it is a question of “when” and not “if” such weapons will be deployed.

The winter of 2008-2009 and subsequent winters may continue to see drops in insurgent activities, only in so far as movement across the numerous crossing points between eastern and south eastern Afghanistan and north western Pakistan becomes much more difficult. These “lulls” will be less than previous years, a function of the higher morale of Taliban fighters, with better organisation, logistics and training. This will make them better able to sustain organised operations staged from across the border in Pakistan. Despite this increased capability, the Taliban will continue to struggle to stand “toe to toe” against sometimes even significantly inferior numbers of ISAF forces for any sustained combat. Their increased confidence in 2009 may also see them over-estimate what they are capable of and suffer substantial losses in the process.

The Taliban are likely to intensify their propaganda activities and their violent activities during the election period. They will seek to undermine the credibility of the elections by intimidating voters and warning them not to take part. They will however remain aware of the political capital to be gained from ISAF-inflicted civilian casualties and, correspondingly, will be sensitive to incidents that potentially implicate their own fighters in killing Afghan civilians.

### *Long term*

What has been clear about the Taliban from very early on, is that they see their role in Afghanistan over the long-term. At the crudest level, the long-term strategy of the Taliban has evolved into an overarching principle of continuing to fight longer than the West can stomach. The effectiveness of this has become increasingly apparent as the international community and the media continue to flag up impatience with progress, the need to change strategy, talks of withdrawal and the need, more recently, to engage in talks with the Taliban. One Taliban interview showed this clearly:

We didn't attack any other country. We are only defending our own country. We are confident that we will win this war sooner or later. We are prepared for a war that could last a few decades, but we are sure that the West will start to leave Afghanistan in 2010 and that many countries will pull their troops out.<sup>62</sup>

Although the Taliban still do not show much interest in political activities, they have travelled a long way from their origins and it would be difficult to return to those extremely idealistic days. Even the Taliban would now struggle to return Afghanistan to its pre-9/11 conditions. It is possible to visualise, in 5–15 years time, a deteriorating situation whereby the Afghan President and parliament has lost the support of the populace and is beleaguered in Kabul, the international community are

<sup>62</sup> Koelbl, S., and Yousafzai, S., ‘What’s important is to kill Germans’, *Spiegel Online*, 21 May 2008, <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,554545,00.html>

pulling out due to the poor security situation and the veneer of central government starts to give way to the “old order”: manoeuvrings of regional, political and ethnic factions based around former warlords and alliances.

In such circumstances the ANA and ANP would either start to disappear or fragment into little more than well-armed and trained militias. In effect, the wheel would have turned full circle to 1992. An Afghan President may then be forced to work with the Taliban in a way that brings them back into some form of governance. If the international community disengages—or at least conducts its assistance to Afghanistan at more of a distance, a more politically aware Taliban, with a better understanding of the world and a slightly more realistic approach to what is achievable, might then hold the balance of power – and even become a pragmatic, stabilising force.

## 7. Security sector reform

One of the key aspects of the international community's effort concerns the five pillars of Security Sector Reform—reform of the judiciary, counter-narcotics, creation of a national army, creation of a national police force and the disarming and reintegration of the numerous illegal armed groups across the country. In a country where state structures and institutions have been traditionally weak, SSR is a daunting challenge. The Bonn process, which underlined stability as a central condition for the re-establishment of state structures, has acknowledged that this goal will represent a “slow and laborious” process.

SSR reform will continue to make only patchy and slow progress over the ten years of this assessment. Although the interventions of the international community will be critical to maintaining progress in most aspects of the security sector, the efforts of the international community will be fragmented and often contradictory.

The development of the army and the police and the resultant assessment of their capability are becoming increasingly politically sensitive as they serve to provide an exit strategy for international forces. Western nations looking to withdraw from Afghanistan emphasise the importance of the Afghan government being able to look after its own security.<sup>63</sup> The way in which SSR progress is reported will be controversial. Target dates for full readiness of ANSF units—army and police—may be a few years adrift of their actual capability. There is a high likelihood that, for the sake of political expediency, ANA and ANP readiness will be judged, not on their actual strength and capability, but by authorised manpower strength (i.e. what each unit *should* have), number of battalions created, money spent and equipment holdings. CSIS note:

...reporting on ANA and ANP force plans and progress is often erratic and misleading...differences can emerge between working level plans and estimates and policy-level claims...statistics exaggerate progress by lumping together data on units truly capable of independent operations, units dependent on US and allied support, and units dependent on embedded advisors, US and allied “partner units”, and/or “enablers like US aircraft, artillery, command and control, and IS&R assets.”<sup>64</sup>

### **Reform of the Defence Ministry and creation of an Afghan National Army**

The creation of an Afghan National Army was given a high priority from 2002. Money, equipment, funding and training was pumped in early on and as a result, the ANA has progressed relatively well, certainly by contrast with other aspects of Afghan SSR which did not get the same level of attention, funding or planning early on.

There is little evidence that the force level targets for the police and army—which continue to be revised upwards—are based on a strategic and long-term security assessment, but instead appear to be increasing to attempt to keep pace with a deteriorating security situation. The size of the ANA was originally intended to be 70 000. In late 2008 it is around 65 000 and there are plans to increase its size from

63 For example, Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper: ‘The . . . objective is to build up the Afghan forces so they can manage their own security situation’, quoted in *The Province*, 7 Oct. 2008, <<http://www.canada.com/theprovince/news/story.html?id=bb4c11e0-a552-492b-877a-6c284581e487>

64 Cordesman, A., ‘Analysing the Afghan-Pakistan war’, *CSIS Burke Chair in Strategy paper*, 28 July 2008.

the current revised manpower target of 86 000—which it may reach by 2009—to around 134 000 by 2013.<sup>65</sup>

The ANA will continue to make strides in confidence and capability but risks over-confidence in terms of its ability to operate independently at formation (i.e. brigade+) level. US weapon systems—much more complex and expensive to operate and maintain—are likely to predominate throughout the ANSF in five years time, including heavy weapons systems. There is a high likelihood that the longer term sustainability of the force—the Afghan government’s own capability to feed, pay, clothe, maintain and equip its security forces—is being overlooked and undermined in favour of quickly creating a large counter-insurgency force.

Assessments of ANA capability will need to be treated with caution because:

1. Undue emphasis will be given to ‘easy to measure’ aspects, such as its numerical strength and equipment holdings, instead of less tangible—but probably more important—aspects such as morale, capability and sustainability.
2. Positive assessments of its ability enable Western nations correspondingly to withdraw their forces—the much prized “exit strategy” from an increasingly unpopular military commitment.
3. Priority was given to turning out light infantry battalions. The ANA’s combat support and combat service support elements (logistics, intelligence, artillery, air support, planning and reconnaissance elements are significantly weaker by comparison).

There are significant question marks regarding the actual capability of the ANA. The United States Government Accountability Office noted, in June 2008, that:

The United States has invested over \$10 billion to develop the ANA since 2002. However, only 2 of 105 army units are assessed as being fully capable of conducting their primary mission and efforts to develop the army continue to face challenges. First, while the army has grown to approximately 58 000 of an authorized force structure of 80 000, it has experienced difficulties finding qualified candidates for leadership positions and retaining personnel...ANA combat units report significant shortages in about 40 percent of equipment items [that the US Department of] Defense defines as critical, including vehicles, weapons, and radios...Without resolving these challenges, the ability of the ANA to reach full capability may be delayed.<sup>66</sup>

### **Reform of the Interior Ministry and creation of an Afghan National Police**

The Afghan National Police, in capability terms, by a long way the “poor relation” of the ANA, will struggle to make basic progress. Recruits will be of poor quality and corruption and lack of capability will abound throughout the lower middle and higher ranks. The Ministry of Interior will still have many serious question marks about its capabilities and corruption levels. International community efforts will remain uncoordinated and this will damage the long term development of the police. Provincial Reconstruction Teams conduct their own limited efforts to help train and mentor local Afghan police units. A large new US programme intends (and has started) to completely rework police training and equipment district by district. An

<sup>65</sup> Moss, T., ‘Afghanistan seeks funding to increase army strength’, *Janes*, 13 Aug. 2008, <[http://www.janes.com/news/defence/jdw/jdw080813\\_1\\_n.shtml](http://www.janes.com/news/defence/jdw/jdw080813_1_n.shtml)

<sup>66</sup> US GAO, ‘Afghanistan security’, Report to Congressional Committees, GAO-08-661, June 2008, pp. 3-4, <<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-08-661>

EU mission sits somewhere uneasily between these two programmes without any apparent clear understanding of how it is to contribute. One EU representative close to the programme described it as “too little, too late”.<sup>67</sup>

The United States Government Accountability Office was similarly scathing about police development:

Although the ANP has reportedly grown in number since 2005, after an investment of nearly \$6 billion, no police unit is assessed as fully capable of performing its mission...less than one-quarter of the ANP has police mentors present to provide training in the field and verify that police are on duty..the Afghan police have not received about one-third of the equipment items Defense considers critical, and continue to face shortages in several categories of equipment, including trucks, radios, and body armor. In addition, Afghanistan’s weak judicial system hinders effective policing, and our analysis of status reports from the field indicates that the ANP consistently experiences problems with police pay, corruption, and attacks, including by insurgents.<sup>68</sup>

### **Reform of the judiciary**

While the international community—in particular the US—forged ahead with the establishment of Afghan security forces in 2002 and 2003, the Italian government's assistance in reforming Afghanistan's judicial system is generally recognised to have been weak and lacking in impact.<sup>69</sup> The judicial system is inadequate now and there are many specific problems most of which will not be fully resolved by 2018. A key UN report from September 2008 highlights these difficulties clearly:

...the Supreme Court, the Office of the Attorney General, and the Ministry of Justice suffer from a chronic lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure and a shortage of qualified, experienced, educated and trained judges and prosecutors...Corruption and intimidation by officials remain common. Effective disciplinary and ethical oversight mechanisms providing due process are lacking...<sup>70</sup>

A further significant problem is the poor quality of the key relationship between the police and the prosecutors in detecting and investigating crimes.<sup>71</sup>

Afghanistan's judicial system will still remain weak at the end of 2009 and 2013, a function of limited professional capabilities, the difficulties in recruiting and training and widespread corruption. Links between the police and the judiciary will remain very poor, given the poor quality of both. By 2018 there will probably be some signs of progress, although much will depend on efforts to control corruption specifically and the overall state of the country.

### **Disarmament**

Disarmament issues appear to have taken a back seat in political, military and enforcement terms, despite there being numerous Illegal Armed Groups (IAG) still judged to be active in the country. The final stages of the DIAG process (Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups) envisaged a process of negotiation and letter

<sup>67</sup> Author’s conversation with EU representative, 2008.

<sup>68</sup> US GAO, ‘Afghanistan security’, Report to Congressional Committees, GAO-08-661, June 2008, p. 31. <<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-08-661>

<sup>69</sup> Dreyer, V, US Army, ‘The reform program seriously lags behind the other sectors due to Italy’s failure to allocate adequate personnel and financial resources (it has provided only \$10 million annually).’, *Retooling the nation-building strategy in Afghanistan*, 15 Mar 2006, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/ksil332.pdf>

<sup>70</sup> General Assembly Security Council, ‘The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security’, *Report of the Secretary General*, 23 Sep. 2008, [http://www.humansecuritygateway.info/documents/UN\\_A63372-S2008617\\_SituationInAfghanistan\\_23Sep2008.pdf](http://www.humansecuritygateway.info/documents/UN_A63372-S2008617_SituationInAfghanistan_23Sep2008.pdf)

<sup>71</sup> Author's conversations with PRT members, July 2008.



writing to those militia commanders who defaulted on commitments to give up their weapons or who had not even made such a commitment. As the security situation deteriorates, there may even be an increase in the number of such armed groups. However, given the apparent lack of political will, it is unlikely that formal disarmament processes will be seriously enforced in 2009 and even less likely, given the poor security situation and the apparent lack of political will in 2013 and 2018.

### Counter-narcotics

The Afghan narcotics economy is judged to be equivalent to half of Afghanistan's legitimate economy. As such it is a key provider of incomes for large parts of the Afghan population. The profits have also been assessed as providing up to 100m USD into the war chest of the Taliban. The dilemma for Afghanistan and the international community has been caused by the need to replace the highly resilient and valuable poppy crop with a viable legal alternative with similar qualities of resilience and value without destroying local economies in the process. Urgency is added to this need with the likelihood that, directly or indirectly, narcotics money is funding security problems and instability across the country and is in particular helping to provide weapons, funds and recruits for the Taliban insurgency.<sup>72</sup>

A further dilemma is that many, if not most, troop contributing countries in ISAF have remained unwilling to get involved in counter-narcotics activities because they fear a backlash from either angry farmers, the “drug lords” or the insurgents. Superficially positive reports that at the October 2008 NATO Defence Ministerial meeting, member nations agreed to be more proactive in targeting narcotics activity in Afghanistan appear caveat-laden and should be treated with caution. A significant shift in approach (and actions) looks unlikely. The Taliban have historically had a flexible approach to poppy growing – officially opposed to it, they tolerated it for some time in the 1990s before reducing production by around 90% in 2001. At present, they shrewdly pose as the “protectors” of Pushtun poppy farmers who fear loss of livelihood at the hands of Afghan government and international community eradication schemes.<sup>73</sup>

The international community's efforts (led by the UK since 2002) to deal with Afghanistan's narcotic cultivation, processing and trafficking issues have been a flawed and confused process. Solving one problem invariably appears to create two more – if you eradicate farmer's poppy crops you create unemployment and support for the Taliban. It has proved difficult to identify and apply coherent and effective strategies. Several approaches have been attempted since 2002: compensated eradication, enforced eradication, targeting of the processing laboratories and the traffickers, negotiating with farmers to provide aid, reconstruction and alternative livelihoods in exchange for not planting poppy.

Two further potential strategies have waited in the wings for some time: buying the Afghan poppy crop for legal applications of opium-based products in the medical industry and large-scale enforced eradication through aerial crop-spraying techniques using light aircraft. Both of these remain highly controversial (and, arguably, ultimately unworkable) for very different reasons, but at the very least, given the large amount of publicity given to both, they must be serving to create confusion amongst the Afghan populace as to what the international community's attitude to narcotics actually is.

<sup>72</sup> Schmitt, E., Mazzetti, M., Dempsey, J., 'U.S. military leader sees Afghan situation worsening', Oct. 9, 2008, *International Herald Tribune*, <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/10/09/asia/nato.php>

<sup>73</sup> Ames, P., 'NATO agrees on Afghan drug role for military', *Associated Press*, 11 Oct. 2008, <http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5imflKilK5uBbqeWPMbBaLqXqGpZQD93NNUL00>

Although there are some encouraging signs that poppy cultivation has declined since last year and more provinces have been declared free of poppy, it is far too early to declare that the corner has been turned. The international community (and governments in particular) can quite easily allow itself be deceived by statistics. Extreme caution will be needed before a 'victory' can be declared—although cultivation may go down in any given year, the yield per hectare may go up, increasing the value of the crop. Local agreements (Nangarhar in 2004), through the co-operation with local farmers, may artificially produce a significant reduction for a year only, with farmers reverting to planting again if they feel they have not been adequately supported with promised aid, support and funding.

Market forces (the state of the Afghan economy, provision of viable alternative livelihoods and the global demand for narcotics) and improvements or declines in the security situation will continue to determine, on a year to year basis, whether provinces see increases or decreases in narcotic cultivation, processing or trafficking. In previous years, decreases in production have been heralded only to see the reversal of the trend the following year.<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, reporting demonstrates that poppy cultivation, processing and trafficking tend to be concentrated in areas of instability. With government reach into much of the south, south-east and east of the country being limited by a violent insurgency that is, if not dependent, then is a significant beneficiary from narcotics money, the drug industry is likely to remain a significant problem in Afghanistan for as long as the insurgency. There will probably be some easing of production over the short to medium term. If increasing instability returns, poppy cultivation will similarly return and could easily and quickly return to parts of the west and north that are currently showing signs of reduction.

### **Provincial Reconstruction Teams**

*Are PRTs a model or a muddle?*

Michael J. McNerney, 2005.<sup>75</sup>

The Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) are intended to play key roles in the international community effort to assist with reform of the Afghan security sector. However, the concept serves as a perfect example of the weaknesses inherent in the international community's approach to Afghanistan—well-intentioned and with much good effort, but with limited commitment, limited resources, an absence of coordination and a lack of a strategy. The development of the PRTs have been based, not on a strategic assessment of what is judged to be needed, but on what is willing to be contributed.

The idea was developed after a request by President Hamid Karzai in 2002 for an immediate expansion of international forces across the country in order to assist in minimising the risk of “power vacuums” emerging in the aftermath of the Taliban collapse. The idea was based around a US-design of “Joint Regional Teams”, small groups of military and civilians intended to undertake light and short-term construction work (digging wells, repairing school buildings), provide limited aid and

<sup>74</sup> Patience, M., 'UN reports Afghan opium decline', *BBC News*, 26 Aug. 2008, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7582018.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7582018.stm)

<sup>75</sup> McNerney, M., 'Stabilisation and reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?', *Parameters*, Winter 2005–2006, <<http://www.carlisle.army.mil/USAWC/PARAMETERS/05winter/contents.htm>

assist in stabilising the local security situation. In essence, they were to conduct localised and small-scale Hearts and Minds activities.

### *Progress*

At some point in mid-2002 it was decided (anecdotal reporting suggests by Hamid Karzai himself) that the name of these teams should be changed to reflect what it was hoped would form the basis of their work, thus Provincial Reconstruction Teams were initiated. The first three were established by the US in the south-east and east of the country over the winter of 2002–2003. Increasingly, given the reluctance of the international community for large-scale military deployments across the country, the PRTs were seen as the best (if not *only*) way for ISAF to expand its presence beyond Kabul and into the provinces where the influence of central governance was generally between weak or non-existent.<sup>76</sup>

Although the characteristics and activities of individual PRTs are very different, the concept still revolves around relatively small (generally high dozens to low hundreds) numbers of mixed international civilian and military teams operating from local bases and facilitating reconstruction, aid and development projects.<sup>77</sup>

According to the ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Team handbook of October 2006, PRTs are intended to 'assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend its authority, in order to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment in the identified area of operations, and enable Security Sector Reform and reconstruction efforts'.<sup>78</sup> This endeavour, however, has encountered significant difficulties, not only regarding the latent counter-insurgency and the resurgence of the Taliban, but also in cooperation with other development and governmental actors.

### *Problems*

The PRT concept has attracted much criticism from within the international community and Afghans.<sup>79</sup> It is not that the concept in itself is inherently a bad idea, but that the execution has been piecemeal and flawed. With 15 different nations operating some 26 PRTs, the concept is schizophrenic in the extreme. Some nations would like PRTs to be involved in counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics, others would have them purely engaged in low-level hearts and minds activities, others still would have a focus on security sector reform issues such as training the army and the police. Some feel that simply being there, flying a flag and demonstrating a presence is sufficient. Similarly, when it comes to funding, nations can have a tendency see the PRT as the vehicle for their financial contributions to Afghanistan, while others recognise the need to empower Afghans wherever possible and to allow central government an increasing involvement.

The expansion of PRT numbers and funding has not had a significant impact on the interlinked political and security crises in Afghanistan, which continue to move in a downward trend...In many respects the PRTs may have proved more relevant to the needs of the international community, in allowing the promotion publicly of good news over bad, than to the stabilisation of the country.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Jakobsen, P., 'PRTs in Afghanistan: successful but not sufficient', *Danish Institute for International Studies*, 2005, <<http://www.diis.dk/sw11230.asp>

<sup>77</sup> <[http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/maps/graphics/afghanistan\\_prt\\_rc.jpg](http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/maps/graphics/afghanistan_prt_rc.jpg)

<sup>78</sup> ISAF PRT handbook, Oct. 2006.

<sup>79</sup> Ibrahim, S., 'Northern governor lashes out at NATO', *Relief Web*, quoting *IWPR*, 23 July 2007, <<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/EK0I-75F36Z?OpenDocument>

<sup>80</sup> Stapleton, J., 'A means to what end? Why PRTs are peripheral to the bigger political challenges in Afghanistan', *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, Autumn 2007, Vol. 10, Issue 1, pp. 46-47, <<http://www.jmss.org/2008/summer/index2.htm>

The overall development strategy has suffered from a lack of clarity from the outset and continuing insufficient co-operation between ISAF, the Afghan government and other international agencies. With limited manpower and limiting caveats, PRTs appear often to focus on limited but highly visible development projects, often within a counter-insurgency strategy. Without a specific mandate for PRTs, attempts to unify and co-ordinate their approaches are difficult. Despite these efforts, PRT activities still amount to short term crisis management mainly because of limited budgets, quick rotations and increased insecurity.

Many lessons are being lost and have to be relearned as new people come in—this is often only apparent to those personnel (mainly civilians) who are there long enough to see two or three new PRT teams passing through. Each new PRT can make the same mistakes as its predecessors. A revealing and damning anecdote from a PRT representative this year concerned a routine trip from a PRT military team to speak to villagers and elders in a particular district. To the PRT's question: "What do you need", came the angry retort: "Why do you keep asking the same questions? We have still had nothing from you and we don't want you here".<sup>81</sup>

In addition, ISAF's chain of command only covers the military components of PRTs. Embedded civilians report back to their national ministries, each with different frameworks and objectives. ISAF has attempted to improve the coherence of PRTs (a PRT handbook was developed for incoming personnel); yet, its impact remains unclear. At a wider level, NGOs remain ambivalent in their desire to work with and within PRTs—some are concerned that it prejudices their impartiality to be seen to be working with very strongly military-derived organisms such as the PRT.<sup>82</sup>

### *Prospects*

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that, at the very least, a review of the PRT concept is long overdue and perhaps even a significant shift in approach is necessary—perhaps to 'Afghanise' or 'civilianise'. It is possible to argue that the money and effort could be better diverted elsewhere—perhaps through the Afghan government or into a more concerted effort to generate urgently needed Afghan army and police forces. The PRTs do tie up a lot of ISAF manpower that could arguably be better employed confronting the Taliban in less benign parts of the country. However, given that PRTs appear preferable to the international community as a means of advertising their efforts and channelling their funding, it is likely that they will remain in place as a well-intentioned but fragmented effort. A worsening security situation is not an environment conducive to PRTs, who will become less able to get out into the districts and interact with the population.

Calls for increased co-ordination and a more coherent strategy will be made, although most PRTs will remain driven by the national and ministerial agendas of the lead nations running each PRT. Good work is undoubtedly being done on the ground—this author has personally witnessed this—but the real value and impact of such work is difficult to judge. For the short to medium term, the PRTs are likely to remain broadly as they are, undertaking piecemeal training, aid and reconstruction projects. In the longer term (5–10 years), some of them will start to close down—either because the security situation has got worse (or, in some areas, better) or they form part of the withdrawal package for individual nations, with infrastructure, resources and funding handed over to local government.

<sup>81</sup> Author's conversation with PRT member, early 2008.

<sup>82</sup> Stapleton, J., 'A means to what end? Why PRTs are peripheral to the bigger political challenges in Afghanistan', *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, Autumn 2007, Vol. 10, Issue 1, <<http://www.jmss.org/2008/summer/index2.htm>

## 8. Possible variables—the chances of rapid and damaging change

This paper suggests that the likely path for Afghanistan over the next ten years will be that of slow decline to around 2013 followed by a period of slightly faster deterioration as numerous political and security issues from 2010–2012 start to have an impact. Although this is a very negative assessment, it implies that there is at least some time in which to attempt to rectify the situation.

However, it is important to remember that a whole selection of political, diplomatic, military and security factors from a range of nations and power-brokers will be continually at play during this ten year period of assessment. Any one incident or event, or combination thereof, could quickly and directly impact on developments in Afghanistan. Some of this impact might be positive, but most would be negative. If Karzai was assassinated next month, for example, then Afghanistan could be plunged into a period of rapid deterioration in 2009 if the process of succession was mishandled or exploited.

It is intended in this section to take a look at what unpredictable events might take place over these years and try to give a feel for a few of the key implications. There is little that will ‘save’ Afghanistan here, but much that could cause it to derail sooner rather than later.

### **Negative impacts**

#### *Political*

The death of key Afghan political leaders could have far-reaching implications, particularly in the event of assassination. Karzai has survived several assassination attempts since 2001. His violent death would remove a still important figurehead for Afghanistan. Moreover, a transition of power, as set out in the constitution, would almost certainly be in an atmosphere of suspicion and recrimination. Old factional loyalties may resurface and see a power struggle. Similarly, the death of a key ethnic, religious or tribal leaders may also contribute to destabilisation, retaliation against suspects and struggles to control any resultant power vacuum.

The risk of a fragmentation—a civil war or some form of north-south divide would significantly increase if one or a number of warlords or other key power-brokers changed sides. The reasons for such a realignment might be a careful calculation of the progress being made by the US and the Taliban, a key assassination, or an intervention by a neighbouring country.

The Afghan population can be prone to volatile and violent protests. Where accurate information is scarce, rumour and malicious manipulation can inflame perception. The currently poor capabilities of Afghan police and crowd control units have served to make situations worse in the past. Destabilising riots, protests and other social unrest against the Afghan government and the international community might come from isolated and random incidents or accidents, for example:

a) A perceived clash of religions, such as the ‘Cartoon’ incident deriving from the publication of Danish cartoons caricaturing the Prophet Mohammed.<sup>83</sup>

b) ISAF forces involved in a road traffic accident or similar.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>83</sup> BBC news: ‘Four die in Afghan cartoon riot’, *BBC news*, 11 Feb. 2006, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4692172.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4692172.stm)>

c) “Natural” disasters—such earthquakes, floods and famine.

Political decisions made by Karzai, his cabinet and Parliament may also contribute to destabilising situations—a unilateral deal with Taliban elements, for example, may be rejected by parts of the government and parliament and lead to wider popular protest.

### *Security*

An ISAF major casualty incident may hasten or cause troop withdrawals from nations looking to pull out of Afghanistan. The shooting down of aircraft or even a “blue on blue” incident in which ISAF air-strikes hit friendly ISAF or Afghan forces may trigger international or local popular and political protest. Proof that the Taliban possessed significant numbers of surface to air missiles (without necessarily shooting down an aircraft) might also have a similar impact of international resolve.

A major collateral damage incident, involving many Afghan civilian casualties is the most likely scenario. Amidst a high risk of emotive protests, a pressured and angry Afghan President or parliament might well feel obliged to demand control—or even a complete halt to ISAF air combat operations. It is not clear how long the US or ISAF would be able to tolerate such pressure.<sup>85</sup>

A return to warlord factional in-fighting—warlords battling in the north at the same time as Taliban ‘resurgent’ in the south could present a wholly negative and destabilising scenario. Even smaller scale clashes could create a poor perception.

### *International/regional*

Developments in Pakistan can have a direct impact on Afghanistan—local peace deals between the Pakistani government and FATA-based insurgents saw an upsurge of fighting in Afghanistan as these fighters simply moved over the border. Increased security problems in the FATA and other “deniable” incidences of interference can destabilise in their own right or seriously damage Afghan-Pakistani relations at the government level. There is also the prospect of a return to military rule with the failure of another civilian government which would only have a negative impact on Afghanistan.

American combat operations in other parts of the world could also have a dramatic impact on Afghanistan: a resurgence of fighting in Iraq could slow, halt or reverse plans to inject more US money and troops into Afghanistan. A conflict with Iran could see similar problems as well as instability developing in Western Afghanistan.

### *Positive*

There are a few potentially positive incidents that could have a significant impact—these revolve predominantly around the deaths of Taliban and Al Qa’ida leadership. The death of Osama Bin Laden, although a major morale boost to Afghan and international governments, would probably not be a significant blow to the Taliban, who are not as dependent upon Al Qa’ida as some might think, remaining, in broad character, a local insurgency for whom support from Al Qa’ida is welcome but not essential.

<sup>84</sup> Associated Press, ‘Brake failure caused accident that sparked riots, military says’, *USA Today*, 30 May 2006, <[http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-05-30-afghanistan\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-05-30-afghanistan_x.htm)

<sup>85</sup> AFP, ‘Afghan senators call for govt control over foreign troops’, *AFP*, 12 Aug. 2008, <[http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5gBSfrb7X7JTrv8XsV\\_wHANZ4THFw](http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5gBSfrb7X7JTrv8XsV_wHANZ4THFw)

The death of Mullah Omar would perhaps be the most significant blow to the Taliban. It might not see the demise of the Taliban but it would certainly bring rapidly forward splits, divisions and options for talks with the Afghan government. The death of significant Taliban battlefield commanders and lower level political commanders would serve to create pauses or gaps in capability that could certainly be exploited but probably not a decisive impact. The death of one of the more effective battlefield commanders, Mullah Dadullah, in May 2007, serves as an example:

His death was hailed by those officials as a critical victory in the fight against the Taliban at a time when the extremist Islamic movement has destabilized large portions of the country through Dadullah's uncompromising approach to warfare.

"We fully expect Mullah Dadullah will be replaced in time, but for now the insurgency has received a serious blow," said Maj. John Thomas, a spokesman for the NATO-led force.<sup>86</sup>

There is potential for other Taliban difficulties to emerge. Much of the damage to the Taliban would depend upon the manner in which the situation was exploited, either in the political, military or media environments. A misjudged Taliban attack, particularly a suicide bomb causing multiple Afghan casualties, might cause anti-Taliban protests, demonstrations and even resistance.

Factional splits and in-fighting between differing Taliban factions remains a possibility. Although divisions have been hinted at periodically between groups and personalities within the Taliban—Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is more of a fellow traveller with his own agenda than a committed part of the Taliban—anything approaching decisive damage to the Taliban has thus far remained elusive. It is also possible that long-running tribal disputes or arguments over how best to prosecute the insurgency campaign may also cause groups to separate.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Witte, G., and Hamdard, J., 'Taliban Military Leader Is Killed', *Washington Post*, 14 May 2007, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/13/AR2007051300226.html>>

<sup>87</sup> Coghlan, T., 'British forces to capitalise on Taliban "split"', *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 Nov. 2008, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1569261/British-forces-to-capitalise-on-Taliban-'split'.html>>

## 9. Conclusions

*We lost in Vietnam because we lost the will to fight, because we did not understand the nature of the war we were fighting, and because we limited the tools at our disposal.*

US Senator John McCain, 2003.<sup>88</sup>

Ironically, Senator McCain's assessment on Vietnam's past looks like it may well serve to describe Afghanistan's future. At time of writing there has been an unprecedented media and analytical shift towards seeing the war as 'unwinnable' and that talks with the Taliban are the only solution. This shift in perception is probably more damaging than the Taliban. Every year it seems that new debates work over old issues concerning who the Taliban are, what they want and how best to deal with them—with strategies ranging from troop surges to political agreements. Shortages of funding, troops and, crucially, human resources and expertise remain limited or at least only increase in small amounts from year to year.

The perception being created is that of inevitable defeat. Without any convincing arguments to the contrary, or some good news to compensate, this could well be the self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. Nations looking to withdraw their commitments will take such pronouncements as their cue to leave. Afghans will pragmatically, and with by now carefully honed survival instincts, re-examine which direction the wind is blowing, warlords will start re-arming and neighbouring countries will resume meddling—if they ever stopped.

What continues to confuse and distract populations and politicians alike is the idea that a "new strategy" will necessarily solve things. Wiser analysts will caution that it is not so much a new strategy that is needed, but a more coherent and consistent application of existing ideas and efforts.

We have a flood of ideas, concepts, Powerpoint oversimplifications, and supposed "strategies". In practise, most of them range from well-meaning nonsense to rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic... "Winning" does not require new ideas as much as sorting out the flood of existing ideas to see what can actually be done in the field in 2009 and 2010.<sup>89</sup>

At any rate, after seven years of going in what is increasingly perceived as a flawed direction, it may prove difficult to convince the Afghan populace that the West can be trusted to find and deliver new solutions, let alone sell this to the international community. In a sense, the international community is confronted by a dilemma that Shakespeare would have recognised:

'I am in blood, stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er.'<sup>90</sup>

It is true that the situation for Afghanistan looks extremely bleak at present and will continue to look bleak over the ten years of this report. It seems that, increasingly, the international community definition of 'long-term commitment' is approximately ten years. Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper noted in September 2008: 'You have

<sup>88</sup> Kaiser, R., 'The Curious Mind of John McCain' *Washington Post*, 1 Aug. 2008, <[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/01/AR2008080103032\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/01/AR2008080103032_pf.html)

<sup>89</sup> Cordesman, A., 'Winning the war in Afghanistan: The realities of 2009', *Center for Strategic and International Studies* paper, 9 Oct. 2008, <[http://www.csis.org/index.php?option=com\\_csis\\_pubs&task=view&id=5062](http://www.csis.org/index.php?option=com_csis_pubs&task=view&id=5062)

<sup>90</sup> Shakespeare, W., 'Macbeth', early 17<sup>th</sup> c.



to put an end date on these things.’. He added that while Canada’s military leaders have not acknowledged it publicly, a decade of war is enough.’<sup>91</sup>

Canada is unlikely to be the only country to think this way. In the most optimistic scenario, the conditions of government and security in Afghanistan in ten years time will be flawed and fragile with all the very familiar problems currently in evidence still significant problems in 2018.

There is unlikely to be any defining year or event where the situation becomes irretrievable (although the assassination of Karzai, a major shift in allegiances of key warlords or the shooting down of an ISAF troop-laden transport aircraft would probably fit the bill). The years 2009 and 2010 will see renewed (and increasingly US-driven) efforts from the international community, a function of the arrival of a new US administration and the need to ensure that Afghan presidential and parliamentary elections take place and can be declared broadly free and fair.

The impact of Afghan and US elections will do much to distract and there is a lot of dust that will need to settle before clarity returns. However, by approximately 2011–2013 it is likely to be clear whether Afghanistan is to resume a slow decline into some form of fragmentation or whether—probably more by luck than any structured international community effort—some of the developmental seeds currently being somewhat randomly scattered begin to take political and economic root.

91 Canadian Press, ‘Canada Votes 2008: Harper’s position on Afghanistan’ *CBC news.ca*, 11 Sep. 2008, <[http://www.cbc.ca/news/yourview/ottawa/2008/09/harpers\\_position\\_on\\_afghanista.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/yourview/ottawa/2008/09/harpers_position_on_afghanista.html)