
Negotiating the Great Game: Ending the U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan

JAMIE LYNN DE COSTER

INTRODUCTION

Nearly thirteen years into the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan, the conflict appears to have frustrated international political and military efforts to end it. After the U.S. invested in a counterinsurgency strategy, a decisive conclusion to the conflict continues to be undermined by the Taliban's safe haven in Pakistan's impenetrable tribal areas and by the on-again, off-again diplomatic efforts to reach a political settlement. What fragile progress was made in recent years to end the insurgency now seems to have stalled. Instead, at the time of this writing, the Taliban are gradually regaining their strategic momentum, the Afghan government is posturing to fragment along old ethnic and tribal fault lines once international troops leave, and the United States is steadily losing its ability to influence both the Afghans and the Taliban.

Focusing analysis on the United States and the Taliban only, this article aims to examine how the United States reached this point by: identifying the key inflection points in the evolving U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and its implications on ending the Taliban-led insurgency; showing the contributions of the U.S.-led civilian-military resource "surge" and counterinsurgency strategy in setting the conditions for a negotiated political settlement; examining why the conflict has frustrated international negotiation efforts to date; and addressing the question of whether

Jamie Lynn De Coster is a Ph.D. candidate in International Relations at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. She served as a strategic advisor to the top U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan from 2010-2011.

or not opportunities currently exist to cultivate conditions for a sustainable peace agreement before the end of 2014, when the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will formally end combat operations in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, time is running out. If the United States wants to shape the outcome of the war and the regional implications in its favor, it will have

.....
*As the clock ticks toward
 U.S. military withdrawal,
 continued combat operations
 with no progress on defeating
 the Taliban's safe haven in
 Pakistan serves only to sustain
 the status quo of violent
 conflict.*

to do so prior to 2015, when its coercive leverage will significantly decrease. Yet, the United States cannot successfully influence the end of the war under self-imposed time constraints. As the clock ticks toward U.S. military withdrawal, continued combat operations with no progress on defeating the Taliban's safe haven in Pakistan serves only to sustain the status quo of violent conflict. On the international level, at the May 2012 NATO Chicago Summit, alliance leaders affirmed their commit-

ment to an "irreversible transition"¹ in Afghanistan, further encouraging Taliban leadership to regenerate their losses, bide their time, and strike on Kabul in 2015.

The situation also grows more difficult for U.S. policymakers to navigate. Washington continues to be domestically pressured to substantially withdraw troops and resources; anything less is fiscally unsustainable and politically unjustifiable. The trajectory of U.S. diplomatic efforts will not be able to bring a meaningful political solution, reconciliation, and stability to the region. U.S. negotiation rhetoric has rapidly devolved into a timeline-driven discussion to get out of Afghanistan, while the Taliban have recognized that the U.S.-set withdrawal date by December 2016 negates their need to negotiate. The United States finds itself at risk of compromising its own redlines to get the Taliban to negotiate at all, and the interests of the Taliban and the Afghan government do not appear to converge beyond wanting the withdrawal of international forces, which makes reconciliation especially difficult to achieve at all. Indeed, the time for a political solution in Afghanistan may not yet be right. Even so, the United States and its allies feel enormous pressure to transition out of armed intervention. Even at the risk of a renewed civil war.

Now, the pragmatic way ahead for the United States is not to end the conflict, but to get out of it, while hoping to maintain some capability to

continue countering terrorists who threaten U.S. interests abroad and at home. The comprehensive civilian-military counterinsurgency strategy was the best option to terminate the war and eliminate the Taliban's entrenched power. A selective counter-terrorist approach would not have achieved the leverage needed to do so. Instead, it would have only contained the conflict so the fledgling Afghan government could survive. The United States missed its chance to shape a meaningful political solution when their negotiating leverage was strongest—at the height of the counterinsurgency campaign.

THE U.S. "SURGE" IN AFGHANISTAN (DECEMBER 2009—SEPTEMBER 2011)

Between December 2009 and September 2011, the United States was able to build enough coercive power, leverage, and political capital through the counterinsurgency strategy to force the Taliban to the negotiating table. However, the U.S. diplomatic strategy to negotiate a political settlement was not yet fully developed.

In the summer of 2009, General Stanley A. McChrystal, the newly appointed Commander of ISAF was tasked with providing a multidisciplinary assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. His classified report, later infamously leaked to *The Washington Post*,² painted a bleak picture: the Taliban was growing and winning despite every aspect of NATO's collective effort. In order for the Afghan government and ISAF to regain the initiative and reverse insurgent momentum, a more credible and effective strategy was needed. General McChrystal and his team recommended a population-centric approach that would need to be "properly resourced and executed through an integrated civilian-military counterinsurgency campaign to earn the support of the Afghan people and provide them with a secure environment."³ The McChrystal report, and the political pressure surrounding its leak, drove the White House to announce a surge of resources and troops into Afghanistan, and to support a strategy of counterinsurgency.

President Obama's plan to address the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan was announced in his December 2009 speech in West Point, New York. Convinced that U.S. security was at stake, President Obama stated: "We must deny al Qaeda a safe haven. We must reverse the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government."⁴ Largely supporting General McChrystal's recommendations, President Obama authorized 33,000 additional troops to target the Taliban-led insurgency, to secure population centers, strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan's security forces and government, and create the right conditions to enable the Afghans to take responsibility for their future. Most importantly, he empha-

sized the importance of transition and ending U.S. involvement in the war. To limit the duration of this “surge,” the President expressly directed that in July 2011—eighteen months later—the additional troops would begin to come home.⁵ While the use of resources would increase in the short-term, the costs were necessary, but not unlimited. For the U.S. military, this meant that while they were deploying to execute a full-fledged counterinsurgency, a necessary ebbing of forces and of the mission would follow.

The Comprehensive Civil-Military Counterinsurgency Campaign that began in early 2010 strove to do as much as possible with all available resources. For the first time, what military leaders described as the “right inputs”—concepts, organizations, command and control structures, and resources—were put in place in Afghanistan.⁶ The Anaconda model of counterinsurgency provided the theoretical underpinning of the strategy. Using both military and civilian sources of power, equal pressure was applied against all factors that were assessed to fuel the insurgents—attacking their logistics, intercepting their communications, discrediting their ideology, eradicating their safe havens, and winning the hearts and minds of their popular support base. The confluence of the various efforts was intended to squeeze the insurgency to its death.

The ISAF military headquarters in Kabul oversaw numerous subordinate organizations that managed both traditional military missions, such as Special Operations Task Forces and conventional infantry brigades and non-traditional programs conducting other essential counterinsurgency tasks⁷ that blended military command and control with civilian post-conflict doctrine to address governance, economic development, and rule of law shortfalls. During the surge alone, ISAF organizations were established to address corruption and criminal patronage networks,⁸ to promote local reintegration and national reconciliation,⁹ and to build rule of law capacity on the local and national levels.¹⁰ Additionally, ISAF worked to coordinate their activities with the international organizations and diplomatic missions in Afghanistan, as well as the Afghans.

While there was a corresponding U.S. interagency “civilian surge” in President Obama’s plan,¹¹ it was the U.S. military that controlled the preponderance of resources and access to Afghanistan’s most contested provinces and districts. Interagency personnel often deployed and embedded with military units to advise them; however, the majority of surged civilians stayed in Kabul in the embassy/United States Agency for International Development (USAID) compound and focused on building the capacity of national institutions. This meant that wherever the U.S. military operated, particularly in key terrain districts and villages,¹² junior officers and

senior enlisted soldiers were negotiating, building infrastructure, advising on governance, economic development, and rule of law—mission sets they were not doctrinally trained to do, particularly without expert civilian supervision.

Parallel to these efforts, ISAF was also advising, training, and equipping the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the government-sanctioned local security forces. The NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A), established in November 2009, was charged with the ambitious task of transforming the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police from 192,000 poorly trained, poorly equipped, and poorly-led forces to 352,000 professional soldiers and policemen capable of safeguarding the Afghan people and fighting the insurgency themselves by the end of 2013. Simultaneously, U.S. Special Forces teams were mentoring and partnering village- and district-level militias to transform them into “Afghan Local Police.”¹³ These neighborhood watch units were specifically chosen to strengthen the security force presence in strategically important areas where there was little ANSF and ISAF presence. These armed Afghans became a surge of forces themselves, developed with the size and combat skills needed to ensure that the United States could confidently transfer combat operations to the Afghans and exit out of the conflict.

From July 2010 to September 2011, when the campaign reached the zenith of the surge resources and sustained operations through two “fighting seasons,”¹⁴ the momentum began to shift. The “clear, hold, build”¹⁵ model arrested the Taliban’s momentum in key areas and reversed its momentum in traditional Taliban strongholds in the south and southwest of Afghanistan where the main effort of counterinsurgency efforts were focused. Overall, violence levels in the country dropped for the first time since 2005, despite nearly four times as many international troops and over five times as many ANSF conducting operations.¹⁶ Special Operations Forces “kill or capture” raids nearly doubled the number of fighters removed from the battlefield from the previous year.¹⁷ By July 2011, there were over

.....
...[W]herever the U.S.
military operated,
particularly in key terrain
districts and villages, junior
officers and senior enlisted
soldiers were negotiating,
building infrastructure,
advising on governance,
economic development, and
rule of law—mission sets they
were not doctrinally trained
to do, particularly without
expert civilian supervision.
.....

1,800 insurgents who intended to “reintegrate” into Afghan society and stop fighting across the country, with 2,000 potential more in negotiation;¹⁸ indeed, the campaign recognized that it could not kill and capture its way out of the insurgency. Meanwhile, NTM-A conducted impressive and unprecedented work aimed to build both the size and the quality of the Afghan security forces in record time.

While military leaders cautioned that this progress was fragile and reversible,¹⁹ it was time to begin to transfer the control of key population centers, over time, from ISAF to the Afghans in order to begin the surge troop drawdown as scheduled. The November 2010 NATO Lisbon Summit provided the framework for transitioning security responsibilities from NATO to Afghan security forces by the end of 2014, and reaffirmed NATO’s long-term commitment to Afghanistan.²⁰ The summit declaration underscored transition as a conditions-based and not a calendar-driven process, and the Lisbon framework significantly hinged on whether or not the ANSF were capable of taking the security lead. The irreversibility of transition and the long-term success of the counterinsurgency strategy, however, would depend on the amount and the timing of pressure applied. “Together with our Afghan partners,” the ISAF counterinsurgency guidance read, “get our teeth into the insurgents and don’t let go.”²¹

The real value of the Lisbon Summit was in the Lisbon Declaration itself: ISAF contributing countries agreed to provide the resources and the troops needed to support the counterinsurgency mission until the end of 2014. For ISAF leadership on the ground, Lisbon bought the campaign precious time and space beyond President Obama’s looming drawdown date. It was clear that July 2011 surge troop withdrawal date would mark a fundamental shift in U.S. policy on Afghanistan, which would, in turn, erode the support of the other ISAF nations. ISAF leadership on the ground believed that in order to give the Afghan government its best fighting chance, much progress would need to be made before transition and international withdrawal. The 2014 date would also anchor U.S. policy decisions and prevent the administration from announcing a total U.S. withdrawal in a presidential election year, giving the military more time to make progress.

Relentless combat operations placed enormous pressure on the Taliban network throughout the surge year, which began to erode the Taliban’s effectiveness, weaken the Taliban’s resolve, and prompt some individual Taliban cells to consider negotiation. By August 2010, U.S. intelligence reports indicated low insurgent morale, with some reluctant to continue fighting out of fear, and generally, the reports showed a growing distrust of the Taliban leadership, known as the Quetta Shura,

safely harbored in Pakistan.²² By October, rumors circulated that several senior Taliban leaders had reached out to the Afghan government to begin talks. But, until the United States decided to join in the talks, progress in negotiations would be impossible; some Taliban leaders expressed their preference to deal directly with the United States to escape manipulation from Pakistan and because they viewed Afghan President Hamid Karzai as weak.²³ The conditions on the ground appeared to be shaping the foundations for a credible political agreement, and it was these perceived military gains that influenced the White House decision to enter into direct talks.

Where the U.S. interagency particularly lacked consensus, however, was in its broader political strategy and how it was linked to the daily civil-military operations that were being executed in the field. The discussions in the National Security Council process had not yet caught up with what had been set in motion on the ground, and while there were rumors of a few isolated opportunities for negotiating with the Taliban, there certainly was no clearly articulated strategy for seizing them.

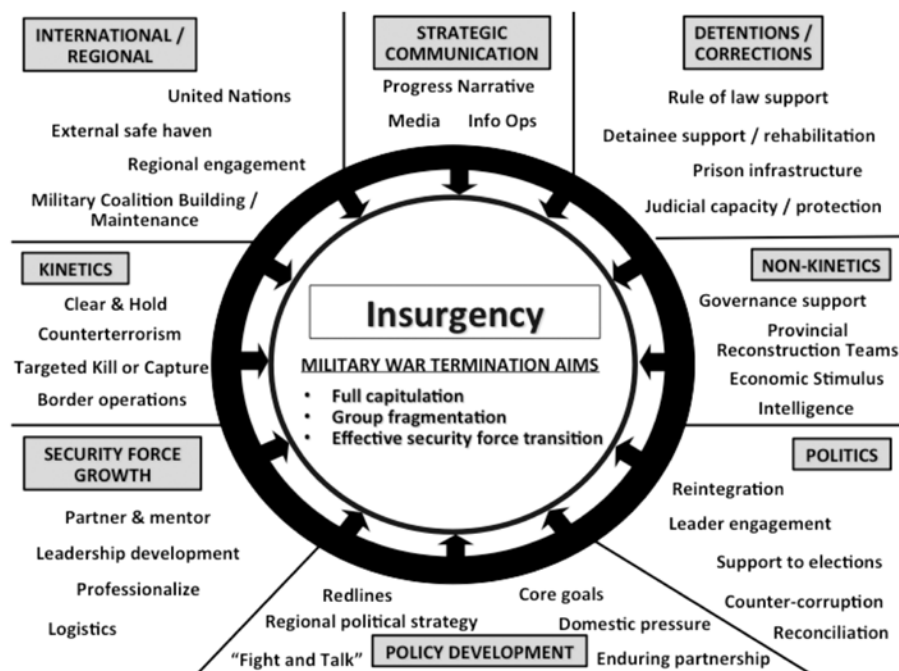
Certainly from the U.S. perspective, forging a political settlement would be a natural way of preserving the perceived gains against the insurgency, while reducing U.S. military

Where the U.S. interagency particularly lacked consensus, however, was in its broader political strategy and how it was linked to the daily civil-military operations that were being executed in the field.

presence there. In her February 2011 speech at the Asia Society, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced a U.S. “diplomatic surge” to support an Afghan-led political process and reconciliation strategy. She broadly described a favorable political resolution to the conflict as one that “shatter[s] the alliance between the Taliban and al-Qaeda, ends the insurgency, and helps to produce not only a more stable Afghanistan but a more stable region.”²⁴ Secretary Clinton also articulated U.S. negotiation redlines for reconciliation with the insurgents: “They must renounce violence; they must abandon their alliance with al-Qaeda, and they must abide by the Constitution of Afghanistan.”²⁵ By July 2011, a number of clandestine “exploratory” peace talks between the United States, Taliban, Pakistan, and Afghan governments had taken place with the support of a handful of other countries. Then-ISAF Commander General David H. Petraeus, was reportedly meeting with supposed Taliban interlocutors in his office in Kabul.²⁶ Efforts to pursue political reconciliation with the Taliban in the surge phase, while nascent, were increasingly earnest.

War termination theorists broadly argue that U.S. strategic thinking on ending wars is not as well developed or as coherent as it is on starting and executing wars.²⁷ Examined through a war termination lens, however, the pillars of ISAF's counterinsurgency strategy during the surge actively drove towards creating suitable conditions to end the conflict. As illustrated in Figure 1, ISAF's comprehensive civil-military counterinsurgency strategy aimed to produce one of three military outcomes: 1) drive the Taliban to full capitulation through the use of overwhelming force; 2) fragment and weaken the insurgency to ensure it is strategically ineffective and divorced from al-Qaeda; and 3) build the capacity and capabilities of the ANSF to hold off insurgent advances themselves. All three of these military objectives directly supported efforts to forge a negotiated ending to the conflict once the diplomatic strategy was in place—as the termination of war is both a military and diplomatic business.

Figure 1: Comprehensive Civil-Military Counterinsurgency Efforts to End the War



The top military leadership, when planning and executing the surge, was critically focused on ending the war for two reasons: 1) international force levels, resources, and contributions would drop considerably by the end of 2012; 2) political and domestic support in the capitals of the troop contributing nations was quickly eroding. General Petraeus, one of the prin-

cial architects of the strategy, was well versed in both the political and military challenges he faced in order for the United States to come out of this conflict on the positive side of history. His recent experience in Iraq focused his leadership at the helm of the Afghan conflict to be cognizant of critical U.S. domestic “centers of gravity” that would both help and hinder the campaign. On the ground, Petraeus and his commanders focused ruthlessly on fighting and eliminating the enemy as quickly as possible, but in keeping with his counterinsurgency guidance. In essence, he intended to do as much as possible and bring all of his resources to bear, for as long as his civilian bosses let him. It was his best chance at success, given his short timeline.

If the counterinsurgency strategy is to be faulted, it is to be faulted in its ambitious agenda to try to address *everything* at the same time. State-building theorists stress the importance of timing and the order of initiatives to execute sustainable state building.²⁸ ISAF’s security, governance, and development lines of operation sought to tackle the causes of conflict, in particular, greed, grievance, and ethnicity; the conflict itself, with both conventional and special operations; and terminating the conflict. Considerable emphasis was placed on reintegration programs for fighters on the local level and political reconciliation with the Taliban at the strategic level. In the main effort areas of Helmand and Kandahar provinces, for example, the military forces were well positioned to execute the strategy. They penetrated the most contested areas of the country where other international organizations could not reach, and with them brought persuasive power in the form of resources—money, materials, essential services, and firepower.

It can be argued that it was this power that generated the “progress” in Afghanistan as quickly as it had. Yet, such conditions often produce what Barnett and Zurcher call “compromised peacebuilding,” where “peacebuilders” pursue stability with local elites “creating the appearance of change while leaving largely intact existing state-society relations.”²⁹ This may not be conducive to creating the

conditions for a sustainable peace at all. Ironically, in the Afghan case, the peacebuilders who had the most significant interaction with local elites were often soldiers who were not trained in the peacebuilding practice.

While it is too soon to tell, well-intentioned surge efforts may simply have reinforced existing ethnic cleavages between the Pashtun south and the Northern Alliance, which could increase the risk of civil war once the international security forces transition out.

While it is too soon to tell, well-intentioned surge efforts may simply have reinforced existing ethnic cleavages between the Pashtun south and the Northern Alliance, which could increase the risk of civil war once the international security forces transition out.

Barnett and Zurcher's point is particularly important in framing the strategic relationship between Afghan government officials and the primary representatives of the international community. If the surge did manifest itself as a form of compromised state-building, it would predict that as the local elites' power interests are threatened or as these interests increasingly diverge with those of the international community, the local elites would increasingly exert their sovereignty and obstruct the peacebuilders' efforts. There are already indications that this happened and is happening. Once the drawdown was announced in July 2010, and the Afghans became acutely aware that the international community would leave with its forces and resources, the relationship between the Afghans and the international actors, especially with the United States, began to change. In the year that followed the surge, symptoms of their ethnic divisions started to show more prominently in Kabul, which would later directly affect U.S.-led negotiations to end the war with the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Yet, the pressure applied on the insurgents by the surge forces generated an enormous amount of political and diplomatic leverage in a short period of time. Hard power had provided a window for non-violent conflict resolution strategies. This leverage, in theory, would have put U.S. negotiators in a position of strength at the table from the onset of the talks. However, a number of tactical blunders and political dynamics over the year following the surge would jeopardize the progress that was made and significantly lessen the leverage the surge team paid such a high price to gain. Plans for a negotiated settlement, and the U.S. involvement in shaping it, would stagnate.

TRANSITION, PROBLEMS WITH PAKISTAN, AND A SHIFT IN U.S. POLICY (SEPTEMBER 2011—SEPTEMBER 2012)

The momentum would begin to shift back to the Taliban's advantage between the traditional "fighting seasons" of 2011 and 2012. The power that the United States had accumulated to influence the Afghan conflict began to diffuse as a function of its revised policy in the region, especially once the timeframe for the end of combat operations was set for December 2014. Numerous tactical mistakes would also take their toll on the narrative of progress. Waning U.S. coercive leverage on the Taliban, due in part

to a breakdown in U.S.-Pakistan relations³⁰ and unchallenged Taliban safe haven in the tribal region, significantly constrained negotiating efforts.

After implementing a broad counterinsurgency strategy, U.S. policy refocused on the original two, more narrowly defined, core goals to rein-in the war and prepare to bring it to a close: to deny *safe haven* to al-Qaeda and to deny the Taliban the *ability* to overthrow the Afghan government.³¹ A better strategy to pursue these more limited goals would have been a targeted counter-terrorism campaign, but at this point it was too late to abruptly shift the strategy. This evolving U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan regional strategy, driven by policymakers' timelines in Washington and not by conditions on the ground, called for a reduction of forces, an end to combat operations, and a natural transition to Afghan security lead. As the policy shifted, the overlap of U.S. and Afghan objectives increasingly diverged. The Afghan government became anxious about the forthcoming reduction in international assistance and is still faced with what they perceive to be numerous existential threats both within and outside its borders. This reality often encourages Afghan officials to deviate from what the United States wants them to do and hedge with other potential partners to protect their interests.

In late June 2011, as promised in his December 2009 speech, President Obama announced his decision to withdraw all 33,000 surge troops by September 2012.³² That following year would prove to be especially challenging for the United States as it faced a policy-driven downsizing of its operations. Although such a drawdown and transition of combat operations to the Afghan military and police is a natural and necessary evolution in ending involvement in the conflict, the timing and management of this drawdown proved to be precarious: ISAF simultaneously had to fight a resurgent enemy with fewer capabilities, and counter a growing narrative that the international community is losing the war.

On the ground, a number of ISAF tactical gaffes significantly affected the strategic tide of the war. Numerous incidents, involving U.S. forces in particular, strained ISAF's progress—video footage of Marines urinating on Taliban corpses, soldiers caught inadvertently burning Qurans, and the American killing spree that killed seventeen civilians and caused a widespread backlash. Afghans violently rioted and protested U.S. "occupation" and the danger to U.S. bases forced them to go on lockdown for many days. Additionally, there was a disturbing increase in the number of "green on blue" attacks—incidents where Afghan soldiers turn violent and often deadly on their ISAF trainers; the number of incidents in 2012 was nearly five times higher than from 2003-2009, and nearly triple the number of incidents in 2010.³³ The Taliban were able to maximize these ISAF mistakes

to rally their Taliban fighters and inspire other Afghans to resist. This adept strategic communication combined with numerous attacks on ISAF bases and convoys negated any positive press coming from the country.

At home, support for the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan's war plummeted below 30 percent—below the lowest support for Iraq's highly unpopular war—amidst an economic crisis and a presidential election campaign.³⁴ The confluence of domestic factors in all of the ISAF troop contributing nations put enormous political strain on the war effort and encouraged international discussions for accelerating a delicate transition and withdrawal process, especially as the Taliban continued to conduct sensational attacks, many of which were planned, resourced, and launched from Pakistan's lawless border region.

It became clear by fall 2011 that despite all of the headway in Afghanistan, the campaign had not been able to reach and defeat the Taliban in their Pakistani safe haven. This condition directly due to Pakistan's harboring of insurgents, militants, and terrorists and the failure of U.S. military and diplomatic efforts to convince them to do otherwise. U.S.-Pakistan relations had taken a fateful turn when, in May 2011, a team of U.S. Special Forces raided the compound of al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden (OBL) in Pakistan and killed him. While Americans celebrated in the streets, there was much that remained unresolved in a bilateral relationship characterized by fits and starts. In Pakistan, the OBL raid would have more troublesome consequences for the United States and mark a new inflection point in regional insecurity. Although the relationship was already rocky after the Raymond Davis affair,³⁵ the success of the United States surge into Afghanistan was increasingly pressuring the Pakistan military to hedge on the ultimate defeat of the Taliban, and to abandon their support of militants and Afghan Taliban in the border region. Pakistani counterinsurgency operations in the tribal areas, which had begun to pressure fighters from the east in coordination with U.S. operations in the west, lost steam as relations between the two uneasy allies faltered. Despite the progress on the Afghan side of the border, the OBL raid reaffirmed to Pakistan that the U.S. would not be able—and did not have the will—to decisively beat the Taliban now that OBL was dead.

U.S.-Pakistan cooperation and progress along the border completely ceased when, in November 2011, an ISAF airstrike responding to a close-air support call inadvertently killed twenty-four Pakistani soldiers. At this point, Pakistan's lackluster counterinsurgency efforts in the tribal areas were having little strategic effect, much of the communication and coordination on joint Pakistani and U.S.-Afghan border operations stopped, and the Pakistanis

closed the border for ISAF supply lines, which would not reopen until July 2012. The only tactical tool the U.S. had left to squeeze the Taliban was the covert CIA drone strikes, but tacit Pakistani acquiescence for this program also began to erode and it has remained unpopular since then.

Meanwhile, the only silver lining left—the lynchpin of the U.S.’s exit strategy—turned ominously black when U.S.-Taliban peace talks suddenly halted in March 2012. The Taliban, blaming the United States for a “shaky, vague, and erratic standpoint,” did not want to involve the Afghan government in the negotiations as the Americans insisted, calling it “pointless.”³⁶ Efforts up until then primarily entailed some discussions of prison transfers and other potential confidence-building measures to include setting up a political office in Doha, Qatar, who had agreed to facilitate the meetings.

The strategic landscape of the Afghan war remarkably changed in the short period between fall 2011 and fall 2012. The cumulative effect of these significant events and attacks, combined with the loss of Pakistan’s cooperation,³⁷ considerably decreased the negotiation space and stagnated any U.S. progress towards ending the war.

**THE AMERICANS HAVE WATCHES, THE TALIBS HAVE TIME:³⁸
WHY THE TALIBAN ARE WAITING FOR WITHDRAWAL AND
THE UNITED STATES MISSED ITS CHANCE TO END THE WAR**

While over 50,000 military troops,³⁹ humanitarian aid workers, and diplomats still slog on the ground in spring 2014, the Taliban is safely biding its time for U.S. troop decline to 9,800 in 2016 to reinvigorate their insurgency. When the withdrawal timeline was announced, the United States lost significant political capital, power, and leverage—accumulated during the surge—to decisively end the fight. The best chance the United States had to end the Taliban-led insurgency was to forcefully negotiate a political settlement, which included credible enforcement mechanisms, with the Taliban in summer 2011, when the counterinsurgency strategy had demonstrated its effectiveness.

*When the withdrawal
timeline was announced, the
United States lost significant
political capital, power,
and leverage—accumulated
during the surge—to
decisively end the fight.*

Since September 2012, when the last of the 33,000 surged troops left Afghanistan, progress toward ending the violence in Afghanistan has been stunted even further. Negotiations with the Taliban briefly gained

momentum with the buzz surrounded by the “Doha talks” in Qatar, only to be abruptly halted when the office closed public talks with the U.S. within twenty-four hours of its opening.⁴⁰ The United States has since shifted its negotiating energy on securing a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the Afghan government for a post-2014 U.S. security presence in Afghanistan. That effort hinges on the smooth transition of presidential administration, so much so that in February 2014, President Obama ordered the Pentagon to prepare for a full U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan by the end of the year,⁴¹ with no option for an “enduring presence.”⁴² In early 2014, the Taliban dealt another blow to U.S. negotiators when they suspended talks to free American captive, Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, in exchange for Taliban prisoners held in the U.S. detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.⁴³ Sergeant Bergdahl was released in late May 2014, but negotiations were limited to details of the prisoner exchange. No progress was made toward ending the Afghan conflict, which undermined ISAF and bolstered the Taliban.

The impact of the counterinsurgency strategy on the Taliban is unquestionable. ISAF increases in Special Operations Forces raids were particularly effective in targeting insurgent leadership and in attacking facilitation networks, while conventional clear and hold operations displaced the Taliban from major population centers or forced them to go underground. Militarily, the Taliban were unable to directly compete with ISAF and ANSF in conventional combat, and any Taliban “offensive” campaigns were predominantly unsuccessful. They inflicted minimal enemy casualties and rarely, if ever, gained territory they could hold. Relentless ISAF operations, especially in the 2010 and 2011 fighting seasons, hurt the Taliban in a number of ways. First, ISAF targeting of Taliban local ground commanders caused confusion and leadership shuffling that impeded their operations in those areas for many months. During this time, ISAF Special Operations teams had the capacity to kill or capture roughly 400 insurgent leaders every ninety days. Second, ISAF attacks on Taliban logistics lines and facilitation networks made it difficult for fighters to acquire materials to make instruments of war such as improvised explosive devices. Individuals who facilitated the Taliban’s war-making to include bomb makers, smugglers, and financiers were aggressively targeted by ISAF. Third, the Taliban lost legitimacy with Afghan people concentrated in major population centers, including Kandahar province, the birthplace of the Taliban movement. Cumulatively, the Taliban suffered organizational inefficiencies, the loss of experienced leaders, and an erosion of popular legitimacy, which resulted in numerous internal disagreements.

Although the Taliban have suffered severely in strength, funding, and tactical proficiency during the surge, Taliban commanders still strongly believe that their mission to reconquer Afghanistan and to reestablish a caliphate will prevail for a number of reasons. First, continued faith in the Taliban's cause is significantly bolstered by religious ideology. The Taliban, in their insurgency's narrative, champion the Quranic concept of "jihad" as a struggle that requires total commitment, until the war is won.

The Taliban, who perceive that this war is a just one sanctioned by Allah, is not easily going to give up fighting without achieving their aim. Examined in this light, ISAF's military strategy is not politically armed to combat the Taliban's fundamental "center of gravity," that is, unless it is empowered to decisively annihilate them, which it is not.

Secondly, the Taliban, in their revised strategy, have redoubled efforts to demonstrate their legitimacy to govern, and despite counterinsurgency efforts, remain influential among the population. In many areas, Taliban "shadow governments" are still able to provide local, sharia-based governance, unbiased mediation, judicial systems free of corruption, as well as an independent voice for the Afghan people. For most rural Afghans, these are the only government services necessary to maintain order and stability in a village. The Islamic dispute resolution services administered by the Taliban are viewed as more legitimate than those based on the Afghan Constitution

The Taliban, who perceive that this war is a just one sanctioned by Allah, is not easily going to give up fighting without achieving their aim. Examined in this light, ISAF's military strategy is not politically armed to combat the Taliban's fundamental "center of gravity," that is, unless it is empowered to decisively annihilate them, which it is not.

that are provided by corruptible district and provincial governments. The message to Afghans is powerful: the Taliban can deliver justice where other Afghan leaders have failed. Generally, the Taliban have worked to refurbish their image and have stressed relationship-building with local elders and villagers when they are in villages to solve disputes, purchase supplies, or meet with tribal elders. Indeed, it is increasingly difficult for Afghans to completely avoid contact with the Taliban, and it is becoming harder for ISAF to differentiate between Taliban facilitators and Afghans who have simply come into contact with the Taliban.

Most critically, the Taliban are reinvigorated by the end of ISAF combat operations in 2014. While the military drawdown in Afghanistan appeals to U.S. domestic, economic, and political pressures, it has also given the Taliban space to regenerate, outlast, and, with Kabul unprotected by international forces, set a date to execute a decisive assault on the capital. Once ISAF's military capabilities and forces are gone, the Taliban are confident in their ability to defeat the ANSF and anticipate a quick and decisive victory.⁴⁴

As a result, the Taliban have shifted their strategy to hasten the ISAF withdrawal, which includes moderating their rhetoric on human rights-based issues that western countries stress, e.g. allowances for the education of girls.⁴⁵ In the summer of 2011, after ISAF began the phased security transition to Afghan lead, Mullah Omar directed that no Taliban fighter interfere with any part of ISAF transition and withdrawal. Accordingly, the violence trends seemed to match this directive: transition activities in the provinces and districts have not met much opposition, and instead, the Taliban are encouraging asymmetric attacks on ISAF bases and troops instead of launching offensives to reclaim territory in hopes of pressuring ISAF troop contributing countries to withdraw faster (this tactic has worked on the French who withdrew early, despite their commitment at Lisbon to stay until December 2014).⁴⁶ In another attempt to speed up international withdrawal, Mullah Omar announced in August 2012 that the Taliban would be willing to negotiate with the Afghan government once ISAF had completed its withdrawal.⁴⁷

NEGOTIATING IN THE GRAVEYARD OF EMPIRES

With an adaptable, resolute enemy like the Taliban, negotiating a political agreement to end the war is a daunting task. Since an outright military victory is likely to be unsustainable without constant international force presence, the peace process itself will be essential in setting a baseline for Afghanistan's long-term stability. This process will take time. Using a few analytical tools from conflict resolution and negotiation theory, this next section outlines why it is unlikely that a solo U.S. effort will result in a negotiated agreement to end the war before ISAF's withdrawal in 2014.

The Taliban as "Total Spoiler"

Can an organization like the Taliban be seen as a genuine party at the negotiating table? Powerful ideology, such as the Islamic tradition that

guides the Taliban, motivates the leadership of the insurgency to pursue total power and directs that their goals are not subject to change. Mullah Omar, as the spiritual leader of the movement, both symbolically and pragmatically drives the Taliban war. There is no legitimacy to a Taliban decision without his support; therefore, he is the lynchpin of any genuine negotiated agreement between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The former U.S. Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke, believed that eliminating Mullah Omar was critical. He did not believe that the United States could negotiate with him personally.⁴⁸ But with Mullah Omar harbored in Pakistan, and with U.S.-Pakistan relations still rocky after the OBL raid, the United States is unlikely to reach him in the near-term.

Pragmatic traits at the negotiating table such as compromise, open-mindedness, and conciliation, are in fundamental opposition to the ethos of the group, thus making it extraordinarily challenging to achieve a genuine negotiated agreement to the conflict. In the case of the Taliban, it is also likely to prevent a grand ceasefire from either being signed or implemented. Stephen John Stedman classifies this as the behavior of a “total spoiler,” a group that is irreconcilably opposed to any peace agreement requiring compromise.⁴⁹ A total spoiler’s commitment to a peace process is merely a tactic to gain some advantage in the conflict, or potentially to buy time. The Taliban likely feigned interest in negotiations as a tool to buy time and create operating space immediately after the Afghan surge had severely weakened their capacity to wage war.

This does not mean, however, that the Taliban do not recognize the merits of using reconciliation and accommodation as tactics to reconsolidate their power base. The Taliban have formalized their own mechanisms to reconcile Afghans fighting for the government and have publically relayed their intention to include all Afghan ethnic groups when they rebuild Afghanistan.⁵⁰ The Taliban are also attempting to co-opt and coerce members of the Afghan government to switch sides in order to erode the Afghan government’s legitimacy and to secure long-term support for their government. In addition to informal bargaining with Afghan officials, the Taliban reinforce their point with fear and intimidation; fighters are directed to aggressively target and, if necessary, assassinate them.

Where Interests Do and Do Not Converge

Since the Taliban’s ideology, and therefore their negotiating position, is unlikely to change, it is worthwhile to search for potential areas of shared

or compatible interests with the United States.⁵¹ Further explored below is an analysis on whether or not these interests exist.

Based on cursory analysis, it appears that the Taliban's interests and non-interests are fairly clear. They are interested in accelerating ISAF's withdrawal, as it will enable them to proceed with military operations to regain control of traditionally Taliban territory; they are willing to concede ties with al-Qaeda because it is not integral to their efforts; they are interested in returning to Afghanistan to lead their insurgency within their country; they understand that if they are to return to power in Afghanistan, they would require international recognition as an organization and would not want to be hampered by sanctions. However, the Taliban's military and political strength is integral to their identity. Without coercive force, the Taliban would not be interested in terms forcing them to surrender, disarm, acquiesce to liberalizing social reforms, pledging allegiance to the current Afghan government, or holding minimal positions in government.

*Figure 2: Taliban interests and non-interests*⁵²

The Taliban IS Interested In...	The Taliban IS NOT Interested In...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accelerating ISAF withdrawal ▪ Breaking ties with Al-Qaeda ▪ Returning their leadership to Afghanistan ▪ Lifting sanctions against them ▪ Being recognized as a legitimate organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Being forced to surrender ▪ Being forced to disarm ▪ Liberalizing social reforms ▪ Pledging allegiance to President Karzai ▪ Assuming a secondary position in government

There are opportunities to maximize a few converging interests. The United States would be amenable to conceding to Taliban interests to include lifting sanctions against them and allowing for the safe return of their leadership to Afghanistan. The United States would be especially satisfied if the Taliban could demonstrate a decisive and public split from al-Qaeda, acknowledging that they would not harbor an organization committed to attacks on the United States homeland.

Nevertheless, the real contention lies in the liberalizing reforms that the new, more democratic Afghanistan has adopted such as increasing the rights and education of women. If given a chance, there is no indication that the Taliban would choose to become a productive part of the political process; the irreconcilable alternative then being the continued Taliban aim for regime change and renewed conflict. Moreover, many urban Afghans do

not believe that the Afghan government is interested in allowing the Taliban a meaningful role in government, even if they decided to participate, due to strong opposition and pressure from the Tajik Northern Alliance.

*Figure 3: U.S. Redlines for negotiations with the Taliban*⁵³

Negotiating with the Taliban: U.S. Redlines	
<p><i>The Taliban must:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Renounce violence ▪ Abandon their alliance with Al-Qaeda ▪ Respect the Afghan Constitution 	<p><i>The Afghan government must:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Protect Afghan human and political rights ▪ Remain committed to democratic governance ▪ Continue advancing women's rights

The only real convergence of interests is that all the major stakeholders at the negotiating table have a strong interest in getting ISAF soldiers out of Afghanistan. The United States wants to pull its troops out, but must ensure al-Qaeda does not regain a foothold in Afghanistan. The Afghan government wants to exert its sovereignty and take the lead for security, but recognizes the need for continued international aid to keep their power and legitimacy. The Taliban wants ISAF's capabilities and combat power out of Afghanistan in order to continue their march on Kabul. The Pakistanis want to use Afghanistan as a platform for regional instability in order to build strategic depth against India. In light of this, the only leverage the United States may have left is a credible threat that the United States and international community will return to Afghanistan if the Afghan government falls.

.....
... [T]he only leverage the United States may have left is a credible threat that the United States and international community will return to Afghanistan if the Afghan government falls.

Culture, Communication, and Miscommunication

It is also worth layering the cultural complications and miscommunications that are involved in a U.S.-Afghan negotiation process on top of this already complex environment. Throughout Afghanistan's history, foreign governments have gravely misunderstood the complex interplay of tribal, religious, and government forces and how they shape the political dynamics.⁵⁴

Afghans fiercely resist foreign pressures to unify, and their internal differences only reinforce their disunity. No central government has ever directly governed all of Afghanistan's provinces mainly due to tribal and religious resistance. Afghan nationalism since the Taliban were ousted, particularly among the urban and educated, is driven by economic progress and new liberalizing freedoms; but in the rural areas, Islam continues to be a unifying force, which makes these areas especially vulnerable to Taliban take-over.

Not surprisingly, the culture gap between Americans and Afghans has led to numerous misunderstandings and miscommunications. For example, many Afghans do not understand why foreign forces are in their country in the first place. They still remember the Soviet occupation with resentment, and they project that resentment onto ISAF. Since ISAF's strategic communication efforts have not overcome this barrier, the Taliban can easily control the message to the Afghan people through local mosques and radio broadcasts. In turn, general public dissatisfaction with ISAF placed enormous pressure on the Afghan government and made it difficult for the United States to broker deals with them.

The United States experienced great difficulty negotiating the terms of the U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement, in which the United States agreed to relinquish control of detention centers and reluctantly agreed to "Afghanize" all special operations "night raids," representing two major compromises on the U.S. side. This is partly due to U.S. negotiating style, which has culturally shaped them to be pressured to make a deal by timelines set in Washington. The United States has placed a lot of emphasis on negotiating specific and detailed agreements, which are framed by redlines, and frankly communicates their positions, feelings, and frustrations.⁵⁵ This upfront and often impatient approach is difficult to reconcile with the Afghan style of negotiating, which requires a significant amount of time and is viewed more as a relationship-building process.

U.S. sensitivity to the short timeline will affect any negotiated peace agreement, particularly if they are willing to make major concessions in the short-term that may compromise any hope for long-term stability. Indeed, the current negotiation strategy looks more like a plan to negotiate a graceful, face-saving exit.

Absence of a Mutually Hurting Stalemate

At the height of the surge, the conflict may have edged close to reaching a mutually hurting stalemate, a condition where parties perceive they are locked in a painful "conflict from which they cannot escalate to

victory” and they seek a way out.⁵⁶ The Taliban in the summer of 2011 were under immense pressure and in danger of fractioning. It is potentially the closest they have been to a breaking point since the initial U.S. invasion in 2001. Yet, tactical blunders combined with ISAF’s announced withdrawal in 2014 have shifted this trajectory and renewed Taliban confidence in their struggle. With continued safe haven in Pakistan and no U.S. leverage to change that condition, the Taliban will continue to regenerate and plan operations against ISAF, and once ISAF withdraws, the Afghan government.

The Taliban, who can be characterized as “true believers” in I. William Zartman’s work on ripeness theory, may never reach a mutually hurting stalemate. Zartman argues that, for true believers, the pain of violent conflict justifies its struggle, strengthens the group’s determination, and is unlikely to lead them to compromise.⁵⁷ Additionally, for the individual Taliban fighter, there are religious promises for external rewards if they continue their struggle. In such cultures, Zartman argues, hurting stalemates are meaningless since “breaking down and agreeing to negotiate are a denial of the very ideals that inspired the resistance in the first place.”⁵⁸

Maybe the United States squandered its moment of ripeness when the coercive leverage that the surge generated dissipated, or perhaps the Taliban is the sort of organization that never would capitulate under any circumstances. Nevertheless, while waiting for an opportune “ripe” moment to end the war, the United States should continue to search for creative solutions.

The American Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement

It is now clear that U.S. military and diplomatic pressure generated from the surge will not be enough to end the war despite all of the resources applied to the problem and all of the military gains made. Of the three war termination strategies the military simultaneously pursued (full Taliban capitulation, Taliban group fragmentation, and transition to a capable ANSF), the first two are highly likely to fail. First, without Pakistan cooperation, the United States will not be able to force the Taliban to full capitulation; they are currently unreachable in the lawless tribal areas. Second, efforts to split or fracture the Taliban—equally dependent on Pakistan—to a point where they are either publically divorced from al-Qaeda or too weak to take down the Afghan government after ISAF transitions will not work. The United States should not assume that the Taliban has a breaking point and it would be a mistake to underestimate their resilience and determination.

The third strategy, effective transition to Afghan security forces, relies on the capabilities and strength of the Afghan Army and Police to defend critical areas such as Kabul and other major urban centers from Taliban take-over. The international community has invested billions of dollars in

.....
... [E]ffective transition to Afghan security forces, relies on the capabilities and strength of the Afghan Army and Police to defend critical areas such as Kabul and other major urban centers from Taliban take-over. The international community has invested billions of dollars in the equipping, training, and fielding of this fledgling force—and will need to continue to do so beyond 2014.

the equipping, training, and fielding of this fledgling force—and will need to continue to do so beyond 2014. As major combat units are transitioning out of the provinces, the focus is now on partnering and mentoring the Afghan army and police. Security force assistance and international funding to support them must therefore remain a primary objective post-ISAF withdrawal, as it is the United States's best alternative to a negotiated agreement.

To also ensure U.S. national security objectives, they will need to negotiate an enduring presence with the Afghan government that allows for counter-terrorism capabilities. Keeping such infrastructure in place also makes the threat that the United States will return to Afghanistan with force if the Afghan government falls a credible one.

.....
 Meanwhile, the international community should double down on conflict prevention strategies to hedge against the potential outbreak of civil war after ISAF transitions out, and bolster up the strategic communications plan aimed at delegitimizing the Taliban.

There will be no “silver bullet” or “holy grail” for forging a peace agreement to end the Afghan war; it is likely to be a long, muddled, and challenging process, which would require endless patience to get it done right. This is not to say the international community should abandon efforts to negotiate an agreement or stop promoting reconciliation—as there are many other sources of instability and conflict in Afghanistan. Ethnic divisions, organized crime, and warlordism still exist, and can feed into civil war after ISAF withdraws. International faith in resolving the conflict now rests in the ability of the Afghan government—and those who chose to participate in it—to create opportunities for inclusivity, dialogue, and a national narrative for peace. But, it also relies on the ANSF and their

ability to keep Taliban violence under control. International investment in both the Afghan government and the ANSF must, therefore, continue.

CONCLUSION

Afghanistan's war termination dilemma can be crudely summarized: the Taliban are in the war to win the war, the Afghans are too divided to win the war without international help, and the United States does not need to win the war to achieve its core policy goals. If the United States' goal was to decisively end the war, counterinsurgency was the right strategy. It simultaneously pursued three ways to end violent conflict: forcing the full capitulation of the enemy, fracturing the enemy beyond effectiveness, and creating a native security force able to withstand the enemy's advances and secure the land.

Even so, it appears that there was no consistent or clearly articulated goal driving policy and strategy. This was demonstrated when U.S. policy refocused on more limited goals in 2011 (that were perhaps best achieved through a selective counter-terrorism approach). At the same time, the diplomatic strategy needed to pursue political settlement was not ready when the military campaign drove the Taliban to the table in early 2011. Unfortunately, the window for meaningful negotiation shut early, as U.S. coercive leverage waned shortly thereafter. Back in Washington, interagency divisions, and ultimately, the White House's suspicion of the Department of Defense⁵⁹ also made for muddled policy and inconclusive outcomes.

As a result, the U.S. adventure in "the Graveyard of Empires" will end in uncertainty and Afghanistan will remain somewhere between war and peace—gone seem the days of black and white military victories. In Pakistan's tribal areas, the Afghan Taliban are unreachable and can reinvigorate their campaign once ISAF concludes combat operations in December 2014; they have no good reason to discontinue their insurgency. But will the Afghan security forces be able to keep their attacks contained? Was the U.S. investment in developing these forces the best alternative to a negotiated agreement with the Taliban?

On the whole, conditions are currently not ripe for a political solution

.....
*... [T]he U.S. adventure in
 "the Graveyard of Empires"
 will end in uncertainty and
 Afghanistan will remain
 somewhere between war and
 peace—gone seem the days
 of black and white military
 victories.*

to the conflict, nor is U.S. policy actively creating favorable conditions to do so. Perhaps a more limited approach than comprehensive counterinsurgency would have given the United States more regional influence in the long-term, including an agreement to maintain a few military bases from which to stage counter-terrorism strikes in the region. A signed Bilateral Security Agreement is critical for the United States to continue supporting the ANSF, and to maintain a counterterrorism capability in the region.

Nevertheless, it remains in the United States' best national security interests to remain a key player in resolving the conflict. To get the parties in the conflict back to the negotiating table, to regain the momentum there, and to influence a sustainable political settlement, the United States has only one significant bit of leverage left: the credible threat that if the Afghan situation deteriorates, the United States will return with overwhelming force.^f

ENDNOTES

- 1 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan*, 20-21 V 2012, May 21, 2012, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87595.htm> (accessed March 21, 2014).
- 2 Bob Woodward, "McChrystal: More Forces or Mission Failure," *The Washington Post*, September 21, 2009, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/20/AR2009092002920.html>> (accessed March 21, 2014).
- 3 Headquarters International Security Assistance Force, "COMISAF's Initial Assessment," August, 30 2009, <http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf> (accessed March 22, 2014).
- 4 Remarks by the President to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan. December 1, 2009, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>> (accessed March 23, 2014).
- 5 The additional 33,000 surged troops commenced withdrawal in July 2011, but would not be fully out of Afghanistan until September 2012.
- 6 "Petraeus cites Bush-era Shortcomings in Afghanistan," broadcast on "Meet the Press," August 15, 2010, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/38698040/ns/meet_the_press-meet_the_press/t/petraeus-cites-bush-era-shortcomings-afghanistan/#.T81Nee2M7ww>.
- 7 Headquarters Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency*, Washington DC, United States Government, 2006. Listings of appropriate counterinsurgency tasks are found throughout Chapter Five, "Executing Counterinsurgency Operations."
- 8 The ISAF organizations responsible for addressing corruption and criminal patronage networks were: Combined Joint Interagency Task Force *Shafafiyat* (transparency), International Contract Corruption Task Force, and Task Force 2010. John Ryan, "Units aim to root out corruption in Afghanistan," *Army Times*, March 16, 2012, <<http://www.armytimes.com/article/20120216/NEWS/20120216/Units-aim-root-out-corruption-Afghanistan>> (accessed March 25, 2014).
- 9 The ISAF organization responsible for the reintegration of insurgents into Afghan society was called the Force Reintegration Cell (F-RIC). The Afghan government's

- program is called the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP). Headquarters, International Security Assistance Force. “ISAF Reintegration Guide,” November 22, 2010, <<http://info.publicintelligence.net/ISAF-ReintegrationHandbook.pdf>> (accessed March 22, 2014).
- 10 The ISAF organization tasked to build rule of law capacity was called the NATO Rule of Law Field Support Mission (NROLFSM). There was also a U.S.-only organization that pre-dated NROLFSM called the Rule of Law Field Force-Afghanistan (ROLFF-A). North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “NATO Rule of Law Field Support Mission,” <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_84912.htm> (accessed March 25, 2014).
 - 11 Remarks by the President to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan. December 1, 2009, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>> (accessed March 23, 2014).
 - 12 “Key terrain districts” were identified as the districts that if secured would reverse the Taliban’s momentum in Afghanistan. ISAF’s operational focus was directed in these areas. These districts included almost all of Afghanistan’s major population centers. U.S. Department of Defense report to Congress, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, April 28, 2010, 6.
 - 13 For more information on the theory behind Afghan Local Police see: Jim Gant, *One Tribe at a Time: A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan*, (Los Angeles: Nine Sisters Imports, 2009).
 - 14 The Afghan “fighting season” is a reference to the cyclical nature of increased combat operations in Afghanistan. The fighting season commenced with warmer weather when the snow in the passes would melt, and ended when the snow returned, shutting down fighter and logistics paths for the Taliban between Afghanistan and Pakistan.
 - 15 A “clear-hold-build” operation is a full spectrum operation that combines offense (finding and eliminating the insurgent), defense (protecting the local populace) and stability (rebuilding the infrastructure, increasing the legitimacy of the local government and bringing the rule of law to the area) operations. Each phase—clear, hold, and build—combines offensive, defensive, and stability operations in varying degrees. Headquarters Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-24.2: Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, Washington DC, United States Government, April, 2009, 3-17.
 - 16 Ian S. Livingston and Michael O’Hanlon, *Afghanistan Index*, Brookings Institute, May 16, 2012, 5-6, <<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Programs/foreign%20policy/afghanistan%20index/index20120516.pdf>> (accessed March 25, 2014).
 - 17 Kimberly Dozier, “Petraeus, Headed to the CIA, leaves Revamped Afghan War Zone,” *The Associated Press*, July 29, 2011, <<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/jul/19/petraeus-headed-cia-leaves-revamped-afghan-warzone/>> (accessed March 25, 2014).
 - 18 United Nations Development Programme—Afghanistan, “Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program 2nd Quarter 2011 Progress Report,” April 2011, 9, <<http://www.undp.org.af/Projects/Report2011/APRP/2011-07-25-%20Second%20Quarter%20Progress%20Report%20of%20APRP.pdf>> (accessed March 25, 2014).
 - 19 *Statement of General David H. Petraeus, U.S. Army, Commander International Security Assistance Force and United States Forces Afghanistan Before the House Armed Services Committee on Afghanistan*, March 16, 2011, 3, <http://armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/files/serve?File_id=1bbe2277-0e46-43ab-9ae5-24dd8afad749> (accessed March 25, 2014).
 - 20 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Lisbon Summit Declaration: Issued by the Heads of State and Governments Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council*

- in Lisbon*, November 20, 2010, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm> (accessed March 23, 2014).
- 21 David H. Petraeus, "ISAF Counterinsurgency Guidance," August 1, 2010, in Paula Broadwell, *All In: The Education of General David Petraeus*, (New York: Penguin, 2012), Appendix A.
 - 22 Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, "Officials Note Low Insurgent Morale in Afghanistan," *Defense Video & Imagery Distribution System*, August 25, 2010, <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/55139/officials-note-low-insurgent-morale-afghanistan#.UzGj_Fw9Vg0> (accessed March 21, 2014).
 - 23 Steve Coll, "U.S. Taliban Talks," *The New Yorker*, February 28, 2011.
 - 24 Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks at the Launch of the Asia Society's Series of Richard C. Holbrooke Memorial Addresses," February 18, 2011.
 - 25 *Ibid.*
 - 26 Danny Kemp, "NATO Facilitating Talks in Afghanistan: Petraeus," *The Associated Press*, October 15, 2010.
 - 27 Stephen J. Cimbala and Keith A. Dunn, eds., *Conflict Termination and Military Strategy: Coercion, Persuasion and War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987).
 - 28 Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
 - 29 Michael Barnett and Christoph Zürcher. "The Peacebuilder's Contract: How External Statebuilding Reinforces Weak Statehood," in *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations* edited by Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk. (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 23-52.
 - 30 For broader discussion of U.S.-Pakistan relations, see CRS Report R41832, *Pakistan-U.S. Relations*, by K. Alan Kronstadt. See also CRS Report R42116, *Pakistan: U.S. Foreign Aid Conditions, Restrictions, and Reporting Requirements*, by Susan B. Epstein and K. Alan Kronstadt.
 - 31 Remarks by the President to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan. December 1, 2009, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>> (accessed March 23, 2014).
 - 32 Bill Roggio and Chris Radin, "Obama Announces Rapid Drawdown of Surge Forces from Afghanistan," *Long War Journal*, June 23, 2011, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/06/obama_announces_rapi.php> (accessed March 19, 2014).
 - 33 John Ryan, "As Exit Date Approaches, A Surge of Green-on-Blue Attacks in Afghanistan," *The Daily Beast, the Hero Project*, July 22, 2012, <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/07/22/as-exit-date-approaches-a-surge-of-green-on-blues-attacks-in-afghanistan.html>> (accessed March 19, 2014).
 - 34 "Afghanistan War Support Reaches New Low Among Americans in Associated Press-GfK Poll," *The Associated Press*, May 9, 2012, <<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/afghanistan-war-support-reaches-new-low-among-americans-in-associated-press-gfk-poll/>> (accessed April 9, 2014).
 - 35 On January 27, 2011, Raymond Davis reportedly killed two armed locals in Lahore, Pakistan. At the time, he was reportedly working with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. The incident led to a significant deterioration in U.S.-Pakistan relations; especially on the war in Afghanistan. U.S. drone attacks against the Afghan Taliban in Pakistan's tribal areas were interrupted for several months after the incident. For more information see Mark Mazetti, "How a Single Spy Helped Turn Pakistan Against the United States," *The New York Times*, April 9, 2013.

- 36 "Afghanistan's Taliban Suspend Peace Talks with the U.S.," *BBC News*, March 15, 2012, <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-17379163>> (accessed March 25, 2014).
- 37 For more analysis on how the U.S.-Pakistan relationship impacted U.S. efforts in Afghanistan see Shehzad H. Qazi, "US-Pakistan Relations: Common and Clashing Interests," *World Affairs*, May/June 2012.
- 38 Adapted from often-quoted Taliban bluster, "NATO has all the watches, we have all the time."
- 39 Ian S. Livingston and Michael O'Hanlon, *Afghanistan Index*, Brookings Institute, February 27, 2014, 4-5, <<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Programs/foreign%20policy/afghanistan%20index/index20140227.pdf>> (accessed March 24, 2014).
- 40 Hamid Shalizi and Dylan Welch, "Afghan Peace Negotiator Doubtful of New Doha Talks with Taliban," *Reuters International Edition*, August 14, 2013, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/08/14/us-afghanistan-peace-idUSBRE97D0IA20130814>> (accessed March 24, 2014).
- 41 "Enduring presence" was the term used in U.S. interagency discussions on options for post-2014 military presence in Afghanistan. This "enduring presence" post-2014, however, is now contingent on a Bilateral Security Agreement between the U.S. and Afghanistan. For more information see Nia-Malika Henderson, "Panetta Says U.S. will have 'Enduring Presence' in Afghanistan After Drawdown," *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2012, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/panetta-warns-both-parties-on-defense-budget-cuts/2012/05/26/gJQA5ZtDuU_story.html> (accessed March 24, 2014).
- 42 Karen DeYoung, "Obama Orders Pentagon to Prepare for Complete Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *The Washington Post*, February 25, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-orders-pentagon-to-prepare-for-complete-withdrawal-from-afghanistan/2014/02/25/cfae2206-9e49-11e3-a050-dc3322a94fa7_story.html> (accessed March 24, 2014).
- 43 Qadir Sediqi, "Taliban Say They're Suspending Talks on Captive U.S. Soldier Bowe Bergdahl," *CNN*, February 23, 2014, <<http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/23/world/asia/taliban-talk-suspension/>> (accessed March 24, 2014).
- 44 Mullah Mohammad Omar Mujahid, "Taliban Eid Message 2013," *Registan*, August, 5, 2013 <<http://registan.net/2013/08/06/taliban-eid-message-2013/>> (accessed April 9, 2014).
- 45 "Afghan Taliban End Opposition to Educating Girls," *BBC World News*, January 14, 2011, <<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-12188517>> (accessed March 19, 2014).
- 46 Joris Fioriti, "France Ends Combat Mission in Afghanistan," *The Associated Press*, November 20, 2012.
- 47 "Taliban Will Initiate Dialogue After Withdrawal of U.S.-Led Forces: Mullah Omar," *Press TV*, August 18, 2012, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/08/18/256979/taliban-to-enter-talks-after-nato-pullout/#.UC_4Tu2M7ww> (accessed March 25, 2014).
- 48 Steve Coll, "Looking for Mullah Omar," *The New Yorker*, January 23, 2012, 44.
- 49 Stephen John Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes," *International Security*, Vol 22, No. 2 (Fall 1997), 10-11.
- 50 Mullah Omar, *Eid al Fitr Message 2012*, August 16, 2012.
- 51 Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, (New York: Penguin, 2011), Chapter 3, "Focus on Interests and Not Positions."
- 52 Table constructed by author.

- 53 Table constructed by author from Lalit K. Jha, “No Change in Red Line for Talks with Taliban: Clinton,” *Pajhwok Afghan News*, <<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2011/05/18/no-change-red-line-talks-taliban-clinton>> (accessed March 25, 2014) and The Government of the United States of America, *Enduring Strategic Partnership Between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*, May 2, 2012, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/2012.06.01u.s.-afghanistansassigned-text.pdf>> (accessed March 25, 2014).
- 54 Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 45-46.
- 55 Jeswald W. Salacuse, *The Global Negotiator: Making, Managing, and Mending Deals Around the World in the Twenty-First Century*, (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 103.
- 56 I. William Zartman, “Ripeness: The Hurting Stalemate and Beyond” in Paul C. Stern and Daniel Druckman (Eds.), *International Conflict Resolution After the Cold War*, (Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 2000), 228.
- 57 Ibid, 239.
- 58 Ibid, 240.
- 59 Bob Woodward, “Robert Gates, Former Defense Secretary, Offers Harsh Critique of Obama’s Leadership in ‘Duty,’” *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/robert-gates-former-defense-secretary-offers-harsh-critique-of-obamas-leadership-in-duty/2014/01/07/6a6915b2-77cb-11e3-b1c5-739e63e9c9a7_story.html> (accessed March 25, 2014).