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# Legacy Agenda: The Future of the Bush Doctrine, Part I

## By Thomas Donnelly

*With the recent announcements of a new strategy for Iraq and a commitment to begin increasing the size of U.S. land forces, the White House has taken two important steps to ensure that the tenets of the Bush Doctrine endure beyond the end of President George W. Bush's administration. Since 9/11 and indeed since the beginning of this administration, strategy has been made by an odd combination of ad hoc improvisation and expansive rhetoric. The day-to-day business of fitting means to ends and filling in the policy blanks has either been delegated to subordinates, left to the bureaucracy, or put in the "too hard" box. As time grows short, Bush needs to attend closely to three further matters. The first is as obvious and pressing as Iraq and an important factor in the need to rebuild land forces, especially the Army: a surge in U.S. efforts in Afghanistan. The second and third factors are less frequently discussed but essential for the long-term viability of the Bush Doctrine and the continuity of the Pax Americana: articulate a strategy for the "long war" in the greater Middle East and devise a genuinely global response to the rise of China. This issue of* National Security Outlook *begins a series devoted to these three measures of the enduring meaning of the Bush Doctrine.*

Now that President Bush has "chosen victory" in Iraq, he appears to be making a similar choice for Afghanistan, requesting an additional $10 billion in aid, shifting U.S. units to reinforce NATO positions in southern Afghanistan, and extending tour lengths for American troops. While Iraq is now the central front in the war on Salafist, Sunni revolutionaries, Afghanistan was the "first front" and remains the most prominent front in the continuing attack on al Qaeda. An American defeat in Afghanistan—especially one that follows a defeat in Iraq—would be a hard blow. Even the most passionate opponents of President Bush's plan to secure Baghdad, like Senator James Webb (D-Va.), reaffirm a commitment to victory in Kabul.[1] A U.S. surge in Afghanistan ought to warrant bipartisan support. Choosing victory in Afghanistan is also a crucial step in creating a strategy in the long war for the future of the Islamic world. The United States must forge a plan and find the means to fight on multiple fronts, not only now but for decades to come.

Thomas Donnelly (tdonnelly@aei.org) is a resident fellow at AEI and coeditor with Gary J. Schmitt of *Of Men and Materiel: The Crisis in Military Resources* (AEI Press, 2007).

### The Taliban "Surge"

Victory in Afghanistan is, in many ways, an easy choice. The situation, while worrisome, is not nearly as dire as in Iraq. The purpose of a renewed commitment there is not to stave off impending defeat, but to regain the initiative and exploit a victory. The Taliban and al Qaeda have retained a safe haven in Pakistan and this past year staged a significant offensive into southern Afghanistan. Attacks doubled in frequency during the 2006 fighting season—March through September—and quadrupled in comparison to 2005.[2] Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry, the senior U.S. commander in Kabul, predicts more fighting in 2007.[3]

While the Taliban "surge" dominated press coverage of Afghanistan in 2006, these attacks did not endanger the government of President Hamid Karzai, nor do they immediately threaten to provoke a wider war across Afghanistan. After thirty years of destruction, there is little stomach for a renewed civil war. The NATO forces which bore the brunt of the fighting—and which were intentionally targeted by the Taliban—turned back the 2006 offensive, which failed to achieve its goal of capturing a district west of Kandahar, the key city in the region.[4] The campaign in Afghanistan is not lost, but our initial victory there is far from complete and the long-term future is dangerously uncertain. The reasons for this are uncomfortably familiar.

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Perhaps the main reason, as in Iraq, has been the haste with which the Bush administration, and in particular former defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld, wanted to declare victory. The stunning success of the initial invasion—the image of special operations forces in quasi-native dress on horseback, calling in the precision airstrikes that ripped apart the Taliban's defenses—was a living embodiment of the idea of defense transformation. But the reality has been in the challenges of bringing Taliban and al Qaeda forces to a decisive battle, building a viable and legitimate Afghan state, diminishing the influence of the opium economy, and all the other unglamorous-but-essential tasks associated with the waging of the long war. As Taliban insurgents were fond of saying, "The Americans may have all the wristwatches, but we have all the time."[5]

Even at the moment of defeat in 2002, Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar declared:

> I am considering two promises. One is the promise of God, the other of Bush. The promise of God is that my land is vast. If you start a journey on God's path, you can reside anywhere and will be protected. The promise of Bush is that there is no place on earth where you can hide that I cannot find you. We will see which promise is fulfilled.[6]

Mullah Omar has taken up residence in Pakistan—God's land is not really so vast, it just transcends national borders. And Pakistan has never been convinced that the United States was in Afghanistan for the long haul. On September 19, 2001, just after the 9/11 attacks but well before the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, President Pervez Musharraf explained to Pakistanis the need to temporarily tack toward Washington, lest his country's "critical concerns"—Pakistan's nuclear programs and its claims on Kashmir—be placed at risk: "If these come under threat, it would be a worse situation for us."[7] Pakistan retains its traditional interest in the "strategic depth" that Afghanistan gives it vis-à-vis India; Islamabad is not only certain the Americans will eventually leave but paranoid that the Indians will move in.

## Which Allies Matter Most?

In his 2007 State of the Union address, Bush trumpeted the fact that this has been "the first time the alliance has deployed forces out of the North Atlantic area."[8] The United States has hoped that transferring responsibilities in Afghanistan to NATO would revivify an otherwise moribund alliance. But in the region it looked more like an American retreat, and the Taliban regarded it as a sign of weakness. "They therefore sought to inflict significant casualties on NATO troops as they were first deployed," observed regional expert Thomas Barfield.[9] The Taliban reasoned that this would lead European governments to withdraw their troop contingents.

On paper, the NATO commitment seems impressive—34,000 troops, with just 22,000 from the United States. But that figure is just 80 percent of what NATO commanders believed to be required. Major General Benjamin Freakley, commander of the U.S. Tenth Mountain Division and in charge of the overall U.S. effort in Afghanistan, has extended the deployment of one of his brigades to help NATO prepare for renewed fighting. Indeed, Freakley contends that "it is the U.S. forces and the International Security Assistance Forces that have been on the offensive" in recent months.[10] Speaking to NATO allies in Brussels in late January 2007, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice insisted:

> If there is to be a "spring offensive," it must be our offensive. . . . The violence we are seeing is not evidence that our strategy has failed, nor that the situation will improve in our absence; rather,

> it is evidence of how much we are needed. It is evidence that we must do more—and do it better, faster.[11]

Freakley also rightly argues that NATO forces denied the Taliban their objectives, but Barfield regards the summer's fighting as a draw, which is probably the correct tactical assessment, although it is perhaps too generous from a strategic perspective. Engaged units fought well, but the NATO contingent remains too small by its commander's own estimates; the failure of alliance members to meet those requirements created fissures in NATO that have only grown with time. Repeated attempts to round out the NATO force have produced nothing but public failure. In September, U.S. alliance commander Marine General James Jones tried to squeeze an additional 2,500 troops out of the Europeans, only to be roundly rebuffed.

Worse still, many national contingents—notably French, German, and Italian—are constrained by their home governments from deploying to combat zones. According to Thomas Barfield, these divergent policies are a further threat to alliance unity:

> More significant is the ill will the dispute generates among countries that have put troops at risk. Canada and [Great Britain] experienced fierce fighting and took significant casualties in Kandahar and Helmand [provinces]. [The Netherlands] picked Mullah Omar's mountainous home province of Oruzgan as its deployment zone. They rightfully resent the "play it safe at all costs" policies of the other major European allies.[12]

This skewed division of labor naturally produces a disproportionate share of casualties among the NATO contingents deployed to Afghanistan's hot spots. Last year, for example, the Canadians, who provide less than 10 percent of the force, suffered thirty-six combat deaths, about 20 percent of the annual total for the NATO contingent. This unequal burden-sharing has been a large factor in sinking Canadian support—down to only 35 percent in a recent poll—for the Afghanistan mission, and has encouraged some opposition politicians to attack Prime Minister Stephen Harper, a conservative who heads a coalition government. "Mr. Harper, just like George Bush on Iraq, keeps saying that this war can be won, and that it is going well. It is not going well," contended Canadian New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton.[13]

"People see the necessity of the war but are not persuaded about the effectiveness," observed Paul Heinecker, previously Canada's ambassador to the United Nations. "We have stepped up and taken part in action while some of our NATO allies have been polishing their fingernails in Kabul."[14]

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Neither Afghans nor U.S. commanders expect that NATO will have an easy time sustaining a significant force in Afghanistan. The alliance's own wildly optimistic estimates are that success will take five years, but its capability to generate five years' worth of forces is lacking. European NATO nations collectively maintain more than 2.5 million men and women under arms, but only about 3 percent of that total is eligible to be deployed. In contrast, about 85 percent of the U.S. military is deployable.

Moreover, the Bush administration must understand—and make clear to others—that the Afghans themselves are the most important allies in this conflict. While it would be very helpful if the Atlantic alliance were to successfully complete its first out-of-area mission, recent U.S. policy has come close to placing NATO self-actualization above the advancement of own its interests in Afghanistan. As in Iraq, "transition"—that is, passing the security buck—has become an end rather than the means. The Karzai government certainly has the will to win the fight against the revived Taliban, but lacks the strength; NATO certainly has the strength, but its collective will is in question. Thus, inevitably, an American "surge" in Afghanistan is needed and, as in Iraq, must be sustained. General Eikenberry recently requested not only a tour extension for deployed U.S. units but additional forces. Defense secretary Robert M. Gates visited Afghanistan in late January and suggested that he was considering an increase of about 3,500 soldiers.[15]

## How to Surge

As also in Iraq, an American surge cannot simply mean throwing more troops at a failing strategy. To begin with, the United States must recognize Afghanistan not only

for what it is but for what we wish it to become: one of our closest allies in the long war. We ought not to be looking for an "exit strategy." Afghanistan is still a weak state, but its strategic position could hardly be more important. It is the outpost from which we hunt for Osama bin Laden and the al Qaeda leadership. It presents us with a potential "second front" on Iran's eastern border. It allows us to keep a watchful eye on Pakistan. It is a listening post from which we can monitor developments in Uzbekistan, home to violent Islamists and a potential source of trouble in the near future, and Central Asia more generally. Afghanistan also offers a window on western China.

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Second, we must stop undermining the Karzai government. It has become increasingly fashionable for inside-the-beltway types to lament the Afghan president's many weaknesses. Yes, he has made a political alliance with corrupt factional leaders, and yes, the problems of the drug trade complicate Kabul's authority. But state-building in Afghanistan is marathon work, and without a political coalition that crosses ethnic divides, the process could well collapse. Karzai, a Pashtun, enjoys a unique level of trust across Afghanistan's minorities, not least from the Tajik Panjshiris, the dominant force of the Northern Alliance that resisted Taliban control. Maintaining a Tajik-Pashtun front in Kabul is delicate work, and Karzai remains, in the words of longtime Afghanistan observer David Isby, the "indispensable man."[16]

Third, we also need to back Karzai and the Afghans in their struggle to get Pakistan to deal more firmly with the Taliban and al Qaeda. Indeed, it is impossible to imagine the resurgence of the Taliban absent their sanctuary across the border and the acquiescence—to be generous—of the Musharraf government. The Pakistani president has tried to shift the major portion of the blame to the Afghans and had a famously frosty dinner at the White House last fall with President Bush and Karzai. But both the British commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan and General Jones have said publicly that the Taliban operations of 2006 were launched and directed from Pakistan. The Pakistani military and intelligence agencies have long regarded both the Taliban and Kashmiri terrorists as essential "assets" in the struggle to stave off Indian dominance—a struggle regarded as existential in Islamabad.[17] To convince the Pakistanis to finally give up their relationship with the Taliban and al Qaeda, the Bush administration needs to place Musharraf's other assets or "critical concerns"—such as the Pakistani nuclear program or even the army's position in Pakistani politics—under greater pressure. In undercutting Karzai but buttressing Musharraf, the United States is making a dubious choice.

A fourth component of success in Afghanistan, just as in Baghdad, involves mobilizing agencies other than the Defense Department. Security is the first order of business, but a complete victory—a free and stable Afghanistan—is beyond the reach of the U.S. military. "Our strategy must be comprehensive," Secretary Rice reminded NATO. "Our military and counter-narcotic efforts must create space for democracy and development. . . . Our political and economic assistance ensures that our soldiers' hard-won military victories will be lasting."[18] Alas, while Rice has made a rhetorical commitment to reforming her own department and clearly understands the need to create "deployable" capacity in other agencies, the Bush administration has little to show for its efforts so far. The president's call in his State of the Union address to create a "reserve component" of civilian capabilities is an overdue suggestion and a tacit acknowledgment that these agencies are as yet unable to meet the needs. Fortunately, more than $8 billion of the administration's new aid for Afghanistan is earmarked for the accelerated development of Afghan security forces.

## A Strategy for the Long War

A final component of future Bush administration policy for Afghanistan, as for Iraq, is the articulation of a genu-inely strategic approach for the long war in the greater Middle East. While the president cannot create a detailed game plan for a struggle certain to continue for decades after he leaves office, he must set out a general framework for future strategy-making and establish a hierarchy of strategic priorities. It has been George W. Bush's genius to intuit that the irregular but unbroken cycles of violence in the Islamic world are not separate and unrelated spasms, but the symptoms of an underlying disease of political illegitimacy. But he must lead us beyond that initial insight and leave us with a more specific diagnosis of the malady and how to treat it. While this will be the subject of the next *National Security*

*Outlook*, it is also a crucial element in properly shaping a surge in Afghanistan. We must not only do more, better, and faster, we must also be prepared to do it wisely and for a longer time. As Condoleezza Rice put it, "We must stay, we must fight, we must win."[19]

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*AEI research assistant Colin Monaghan and editorial assistant Evan Sparks worked with Mr. Donnelly to edit and produce this* National Security Outlook.

## Notes

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17. To better understand the role of Pakistani strategy and policy in unleashing the Taliban, see Elizabeth Rubin, "In the Land of the Taliban," *The New York Times Magazine*, October 22, 2006.

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