

Insurgency Literature Review

(ILR) No. 40

27 July 2009

Contents

[Article 1](#) “**A Counterterrorism Strategy for the Obama Administration,**” by **Bruce Hoffman, Terrorism and Political Violence, Vol. 21, No. 3, July 2009.** *Rather than viewing the fundamental organizing principle of American national defense strategy in this unconventional realm as a global war on terrorism, it may be more useful to re-conceptualize it in terms of a global counterinsurgency (GCOIN). Such an approach would a priori knit together the equally critical political, economic, diplomatic, and developmental sides inherent to the successful prosecution of counterinsurgency to the existing dominant military side of the equation. Greater attention to this integration of American capabilities would provide incontrovertible recognition of the importance of endowing a GCOIN with an overriding and comprehensive, multi-dimensional policy. Ideally, this policy would embrace several elements, including a clear strategy; defined structure for implementing it; and, a vision of inter-government agency cooperation, and the unified effort to guide it.*

[Article 2](#) “**Applying Counterinsurgency Principles in Pakistan’s Frontier,**” by **Joshua T. White, Brookings Institution, Counterinsurgency and Pakistan Paper Series, No. 2, 25 June 2009.** *Pakistan is facing a complex insurgent threat in its North-West Frontier Province and Federally Administered Tribal Areas. This threat does not emerge from one cohesive insurgency, but rather from a number of distinct and locally-oriented groups, many of which have taken the name “Taliban.” Any attempt at counterinsurgency in the Pakistani frontier needs to begin by recognizing the fragmented and often localized nature of the insurgencies which are challenging and gradually displacing the state. This paper will take a closer look at the ways in which Pakistan, in its partnership with the United States, might better apply counterinsurgency principles in the frontier. Two presumptions are important to remember: that it is the government of Pakistan, and not the United States, which best understands the local context of the frontier; and that there are a number of ways in which the United States can support these efforts.*

[Article 3](#) “**The Taliban’s Winning Strategy in Afghanistan,**” by **Gilles Dorransoro, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Paper, 2009.** *A misunderstanding of the insurgency is at the heart of the difficulties facing the International Coalition (IC) in Afghanistan. The Taliban are often described as an umbrella movement comprising loosely connected groups that are essentially local and unorganized. On the contrary, this report’s analysis of the structure and strategy of the insurgency reveals a resilient adversary, engaged in strategic planning and coordinated action. Since the Bush administration’s departure, the United States has tried to develop a strategy for defeating the Taliban. Nonetheless, the recent initiatives lack coherence and do not offer a credible response to the advance of the insurgency. Based on this analysis, the IC should develop a more national perspective on the war and devise a superior strategy to halt the progress of the insurgency.*

[Article 4](#) “**The Irresistible Illusion,**” by **Rory Stewart, London Review of Books, 9 July 2009.** *Obama’s new policy has a very narrow focus—counterterrorism—and a very broad definition of how to achieve it: no less than the fixing of the Afghan state. This policy rests on misleading ideas about moral obligation, our capacity, the strength of our adversaries, the threat posed by Afghanistan, the relations between our different objectives, and the value of a state. The power of*

the United States and its allies, and our commitment, knowledge, and will, are limited. The best Afghan policy would be to reduce the number of foreign troops from the current level of 90,000 to far fewer—perhaps 20,000. In that case, two distinct objectives would remain for the international community: development and counterterrorism. Neither would amount to the building of an Afghan state. At the same time, the West should provide generous development assistance—not only to keep consent for the counterterrorism operations, but as an end in itself.

Article 5 “Funding the U.S. Counterinsurgency Wars,” by Stephen Biddle, Council on Foreign Relations, Expert Brief, 19 June 2009. *As Congress turns to the defense budget, battles over constituency politics and cost overruns will mask a deeper story. Defense budgets represent the nation’s effort to meet the demands of warfare, and this one in particular reflects an underlying debate over the future of war. A younger generation of officers and civilian analysts shaped by Iraq and Afghanistan sees the future of war in low-intensity conflicts with non-state actors. Traditionalists argue that this low-tech transformation agenda is actually a backward-looking program to win the last war rather than the next one. Ironically, the traditionalists are right about tomorrow, but the young Turks are right about today.*

The Insurgency Literature Review (ILR) has been published monthly since April 2006 by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isincreports@mindspring.com) under contract to the Insurgency, Instability, and Governance Team within the Central Intelligence Agency’s Office of Transnational Issues. ILR issues are intended for non-profit research and educational use only. Quoted material is subject to the copyright protections associated with the original sources.

[Top of ILR Cover Page](#)

Articles

Article 1 [Return to ILR Cover Page](#)

1. “A Counterterrorism Strategy for the Obama Administration,” by Bruce Hoffman, Terrorism and Political Violence, Vol. 21, No. 3, July 2009. [KBTGStrategies, KBTQStrategy, KBTITheory, KBTSAfghanGW, KBTSPakWT] Bruce Hoffman is a professor at the School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. We *quote* from this article available at <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~db=all~content=g912649893~tab=toc>.

. . . Al-Qaeda continues to pose the most serious terrorist threat to the United States today. If the 11 September 2001 attacks have taught us anything, it is that **Al-Qaeda is most dangerous when it has a sanctuary or safe haven from which to plan and plot attacks. Al-Qaeda has acquired such a sanctuary in Pakistan’s Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and its North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and surrounding environs. Accordingly, the highest priority for the new American presidential administration must be to refocus our—and our allies’—attention on Afghanistan and Pakistan, where Al-Qaeda began to collapse after 2001, but has now re-grouped.**

This will entail understanding that Al-Qaeda and its local militant jihadi allies cannot be defeated by military means alone. Success will require a dual strategy of systematically destroying and weakening enemy capabilities—that is, continuing to kill and capture Al-Qaeda commanders and operatives—along with breaking the cycle of terrorist recruitment among radicalized “bunches of guys” as well as more effectively countering Al-Qaeda’s effective information operations.

The United States thus requires a strategy that harnesses the overwhelming kinetic force of the American military as part of a comprehensive vision to transform other, non-kinetic instruments of national power in order to deal more effectively with irregular and unconventional threats. . . .

[At least seven major attacks linked to Al-Qaeda in Pakistan's FATA, NWFP]

. . . Al-Qaeda's sanctuary in Pakistan accounts for the movement's vitality today and the growing threat that it presents to the stability and security of both that country and Afghanistan, and indeed to the United States and the West. Every day that the United States allows the unsatisfactory situation along both borders to continue is another day that Al-Qaeda and its allies have to regroup, reorganize, and marshal their strength.

The Al-Qaeda of 2008, it should again be noted, is in fact a mere shadow of its pre-9/11 self. It does not have the freedom of movement, massive personnel numbers, robust network of training camps and operational bases, functioning international infrastructure, and considerable largesse that it possessed eight years ago when it was located in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Its key operatives and senior commanders are relentlessly hunted and, between July 2008 and June 2009 at least ten have been sighted, fixed, and killed in Pakistan by U.S. Predator drones.

But, despite the comparatively far more modest amenities and confining nature of Pakistan's FATA and surrounding provinces, Al-Qaeda has nonetheless been able to reconstitute its global terrorist reach. Al-Qaeda has also shown itself to have a deep bench of well-trained, experienced, and battle-hardened veterans from which to continually draw and continue to replenish its ranks despite the inroads made by the U.S. Predator strikes. Accordingly, the threat that even a weakened, diminished Al-Qaeda still poses cannot be discounted. It is exactly when we are lulled into complacency and our defenses are down, that Al-Qaeda will strike. . . .

The central front in the war on terrorism today is not Iraq, but the lawless border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan. **America's continued preoccupation with Iraq has already exacted a heavy price in terms of mounting instability and growing jihadi strength in both South Asian countries.** Equally significant is the fact that **virtually every major terrorist attack or plot of the past five years has emanated from Al-Qaeda's reconstituted sanctuary in Pakistan's FATA or NWFP.**

At least seven major incidents—including the July 2005 London transport suicide bombings and the 2006 plot to blow up American and Canadian airplanes while in-flight from London—can be directly linked back to Al-Qaeda and to the movement's training camps and command and control centers in Pakistan. British intelligence officials believe that the number is closer to 30—and that figure includes only those attacks planned for the United Kingdom specifically.

[New policy, more sustained focus on engaging Pakistan, Afghanistan acknowledged]

As conducive as this area has already proven in facilitating the planning and plotting of new international terrorist operations, **in the absence of a new U.S. strategy and approach to the region it is likely to become an even more amenable terrorist**

operational environment, especially as Pakistan’s new and uncertain civilian leadership embarks on its stated intention to conclude a series of mutual non-aggression pacts with the jihadi forces arrayed along the border.

Although these agreements are intended to end the upward spiral of suicide attacks that have convulsed Pakistan during the past two years, **they do not apply to the escalating insurgency across the border in Afghanistan being prosecuted by these same groups.** Thus, the Pakistani jihadis are having their cake and eating it too: **a policy of non-interference by Pakistan’s security forces alongside a free hand to continue to strike with impunity both in Afghanistan and doubtless even further afield (i.e., internationally).** . . .

. . . U.S. military commanders in Afghanistan believe that **Al-Qaeda and its Pakistani and Afghan counterparts have three core objectives for the region: [a] Defeat the U.S. military in Afghanistan and destroy the forces of democracy both in Afghanistan and Pakistan; [b] Defend the FATA from Pakistani governmental interference and external intervention; and, [c] De-stabilize and negate all governmental authority in “Pashtunistan”**—the Pashtun tribal belt spanning Pakistan and Afghanistan. . . .

Although Al-Qaeda and its local jihadi partners have yet to achieve the first objective, they can derive great satisfaction from having made considerable progress with respect to the other two. It is now a matter of urgency for the U.S. to prevent Al-Qaeda and its allies from attaining all three. **A new policy, a fresh approach, and better and more sustained focus on and engagement with these two countries thus has been acknowledged by the new American presidential administration.** It is not only Afghanistan’s and Pakistan’s futures that are at stake, but America’s security and indeed the ultimate success of the war on terrorism.

The problem is that until now the U.S. has no effective political or military strategy for either country and appears to treat them separately and not synergistically. Given that the security challenges in both countries are ineluctably symbiotic, any serious effort to stabilize and secure Afghanistan must begin with a clear and consistent policy designed to achieve the same in Pakistan. . . .

[No counterinsurgency strategy is recognized by the military in Pakistan]

Accordingly, **the first step on either side of the border is to clear territory held by militant groups. This is the “secure and serve the population” dictum that is the essential foundation of any effective counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign** and indeed has been the guiding principle of General David H. Petraeus’s successful strategy in Iraq.

In Afghanistan at present there are simply too few American and coalition military forces, and especially too few American civilian experts, as well as inadequate Afghan security forces, to achieve this. . . . **“Live among the people. You can’t commute to this fight,”** is another of General Petraeus’s pivotal emphases. A successful counterinsurgency, embodying the same principles that worked in Iraq, cannot be prosecuted in Afghanistan without sufficient troop strength. . . .

In addition, **more effective use of American combat forces already in Afghanistan needs to be effected.** Troops currently assigned nation-building tasks, for instance, could

be reallocated to providing more consistent and pervasive security **The inability of civilian agencies thus far to fully adapt to a counterinsurgency mission means that the U.S. military has to shoulder the main responsibilities for governance and economic development activities. . . .**

. . . [The] “top-down” approach to building security must also be accompanied by “bottom-up” approaches on both sides of the border. **Because power in the Pashtun belt of tribal areas spanning both Afghanistan and Pakistan has historically been decentralized, any successful strategy must adopt a bottom-up approach that involves working with local tribes, sub-tribes, and clans.** Those groups that have either been victimized or marginalized by the Taliban and foreign fighters need to be the focus of such efforts, which entail the provision of arms, training, and logistical support.

Because traditional tribal governance structures have sufficient legitimacy at the grassroots level, **this bottom-up approach is critical—not least since many groups may be especially amenable to such overtures given the revenge they might seek for the usurpation of their power that “Talibanization”—the accretion of Taliban power and control—has created.**

Across the border, the situation in this respect is complicated by the Pakistani military’s reluctance both to fight its own countrymen and embrace core COIN principles. Even more problematically, **Pakistan’s military is understandably wary that it should not be seen, in the words of one of its generals, to be “fighting an American war.”**

Further, the perception among senior Pakistani military officers is that they are already doing all they can—and more—to support the U.S. in the war on terrorism. “When we keep hearing we are not doing enough,” a corps commander told me when I visited Pakistan last August, “we think, what more can we do?” But **what stands out from these protestations is not how much the Pakistan military is or is not doing but rather the absence of a clear strategy along with a conspicuously poor understanding of COIN doctrine and operations. . . .**

. . . Indeed, **there is no counterinsurgency strategy in Pakistan.** Apart from military sweeps akin to Vietnam’s patently ineffective “search and destroy” approach, **the Pakistani military seems aloof to the exigency of a fully integrated and coordinated COIN strategy. . . .**

[Critical COIN steps include consistent security, governance, and development]

Providing consistent, expanding security is . . . the first critical step in COIN. The second and third steps . . . are governance and development. . . .

In Afghanistan, at least, we are in control and both we and the Afghan government know what is needed and how to achieve it. The problem there is inadequate numbers of personnel to implement a holistic COIN strategy.

In Pakistan, the challenge is more complex and . . . will require a change in government and military mindset. . . . [The] Pakistani military establishment must be made to understand the need to adopt a genuinely holistic COIN strategy in order to

counter the powerful centrifugal forces that are plunging their country into disarray and undermining its fragile democratic institutions.

Accordingly, **a second crucial step in forging such a COIN strategy is addressing governance challenges in both Pakistan's tribal areas and Afghanistan as well.** Government institutions in both places are weak, social and economic conditions are among the lowest in the world, and reinvigorated political reform and economic development efforts are therefore critical. . . .

The third step involves promoting economic development. Though an essential prerequisite, security improvements by themselves are not sufficient to ensure the sustained progress. Indeed, security efforts will almost certainly prove inchoate without the provision of tangible economic benefits to local, disaffected communities. **The tribal areas on both sides of the border have long been the least served by their respective countries' governments in terms of health, roads, schools, electricity, water, and other public services. This inequality has bred frustration, animosity, and worse,** and needs to be addressed through improved security, systemic political reform, and then concerted, well-resourced economic development in support of a coordinated COIN strategy. . . .

[Crucial for information operations to counter Al-Qaeda's ideological appeal]

. . . **[Rather] than viewing the fundamental organizing principle of American national defense strategy in this unconventional realm as a global war on terrorism (GWOT) as it has been to date, it may be more useful to re-conceptualize it in terms of a global counterinsurgency (GCOIN).** Such an approach would a priori **knit together the equally critical political, economic, diplomatic, and developmental sides** inherent to the successful prosecution of counterinsurgency to the existing dominant military side of the equation. . . .

Greater attention to this integration of American capabilities would provide incontrovertible recognition of **the importance of endowing a GCOIN with an overriding and comprehensive, multi-dimensional policy.** Ideally, this policy would embrace several elements, including **a clear strategy; defined structure for implementing it; and, a vision of inter-government agency cooperation, and the unified effort to guide it.**

Success will thus ultimately depend on how effectively the U.S. can build bridges within our own governmental structure and untangle lines of authority, de-conflict overlapping responsibilities, and improve the ability to prioritize and synchronize interagency operations in a timely and efficient manner. . . .

Even the best strategy will prove inadequate if military and civilian agency leaders are not prepared to engage successfully within ambiguous environments and re-orient their organizational culture to deal with irregular threats. A successful GCOIN transcends the need for better tactical intelligence or new organizations. . . .

An equally critical dimension of this process will be aligning the training of host-nation counterparts with U.S. counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations: building synergy; avoiding duplication of effort; ensuring that training leads to

operational effectiveness; and ensuring that the U.S. interagency team and approach is in complete harmony. . . .

The success of this strategy . . . will be dependent not only on bureaucratic re-organization and clarification of lines of authority, but on the ability of our information operations to effectively counter Al-Qaeda's continued ideological appeal—and thus specifically address the three key elements of their strategy: [a] the resonance of their message; [b] their ability to attract recruits and replenish their ranks; and [c] their capacity for continual regeneration and renewal. . . .

[U.S. military needs to transform capabilities to deal with irregular, unconventional threats]

. . . [We] need to craft an approach that specifically takes into account the following **key factors to effectively wage a GCOIN**:

- **Separating the enemy from the populace** that provides support and sustenance. This, in turn, entails **three basic missions: [a] denial of enemy sanctuary; [b] elimination of enemy freedom of movement; and [c] denial of enemy resources and support.**
- **Identification and neutralization of the enemy.**
- **Creation of a secure environment**—progressing from local to regional to global.
- **Ongoing and effective neutralization of enemy propaganda and information operations** through the planning and execution of a comprehensive and integrated information operations and holistic civil affairs campaign in harmony with the first four tasks.
- **Interagency efforts to build effective and responsible civil governance mechanisms that eliminate the fundamental causes of terrorism and insurgency.**

The key to success will thus be in harnessing the overwhelming kinetic force of the U.S. military as part of a comprehensive vision to transform capabilities in order to deal with irregular and unconventional threats. A successful strategy will therefore also be one that thinks and plans ahead with a view towards addressing the threats likely to be posed by terrorist and insurgent generations beyond the current one. . . .

The foregoing is Article No. 1 (IL040A01) in the [Insurgency Literature Review \(ILR\)](#), No. 40, 27 July 2009, prepared by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isinreports@mindspring.com).

[Top of Article](#)

Article 2 [Return to ILR Cover Page](#)

2. “Applying Counterinsurgency Principles in Pakistan’s Frontier,” by Joshua T. White, Brookings Institution, Counterinsurgency and Pakistan Paper Series, No. 2, 25 June 2009 (http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0625_counterinsurgency_white.aspx). [KBTSPakWT, KBTITheory, KBTIStrategies, KBTIManuals] Joshua T. White is a Ph.D. candidate at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and a research fellow at the Institute for Global Engagement. *We quote:*

Pakistan is facing a complex insurgent threat in its North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). This threat does not emerge from one cohesive insurgency, but rather from **a number of distinct and locally-oriented groups, many of which have taken the name “Taliban.”** These local insurgencies, moreover, **are often limited in their aims**, seeking to displace government presence rather than replace it outright.

In this sense, **the U.S. State Department’s definition of insurgency**—which emphasizes attempts by anti-state groups to “seize, nullify, or challenge political control over a region”—**is more subtle and applicable to the present frontier context than the more sweeping definition used by the Defense Department**—which focuses bluntly on attempts to “overthrow . . . a constituted government.”

These distinctions are important, because **any attempt at counterinsurgency (COIN) in the Pakistani frontier needs to begin by recognizing the fragmented and often localized nature of the insurgencies which are challenging and gradually displacing the state.** In light of these dynamics, and the sheer complexity of the Taliban threat, **this paper will take a closer look at the ways in which Pakistan, in its partnership with the United States, might better apply COIN principles in the frontier.**

The discussion which follows is based on **two presumptions. First, that it is the government of Pakistan, and not the United States, which best understands the local context of the frontier. The Pakistani government should therefore take responsibility** for dealing with the insurgencies which have emerged there, and which threaten both the Pakistani state and its allies. And **second, that there are a number of ways in which the United States can support these efforts by way of training, equipment, and targeted development efforts.**

[Pakistani Taliban owes success to appeal of religio-cultural ideology, state weakness]

Since this discussion focuses largely on counterinsurgency cooperation between the Pakistani and American governments, **the analysis which follows takes as its point of departure eight “Principles of American COIN,” as outlined in the paper presented by Dr. Janine Davidson.** [ILR Note: See “Principles of Modern American Counterinsurgency: Evolution and Debate,” by Janine Davidson, “Brookings Institution, Counterinsurgency and Pakistan Paper Series, No. 1, 8 June 2009—available in full at http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0608_counterinsurgency_davidson.aspx].

These principles, while framed in reference to American efforts vis-à-vis a “host government,” nonetheless **capture in general terms a number of the critical characteristics of successful COIN campaigns**, and provide a useful starting point for discussing joint efforts that might be effective in the context of the Pakistani frontier.

One final and important qualification: **the analysis which follows is weighted heavily toward issues of governance, security sector reform, and programmatic cooperation between the United States and Pakistan. It gives relatively less attention to the religious and ideological drivers of the insurgency**, and relatively more attention to the nature of state response to insurgency. Both dimensions of COIN are, of course, salient in the frontier. **Analyses which underestimate ideological factors end up dealing forever with symptoms rather than root causes, while those which focus predominantly on**

ideology tend to underestimate the degree to which insurgencies can move beyond their original motivations to take on political and social lives of their own.

The Taliban insurgency in the Pakistani frontier quite clearly owes its success both to the appeal of a unique and powerful religio-cultural ideology, and also to the manifest weakness of the state in controlling its own territory. It is this latter problem—the challenge of ameliorating systemic state weakness—that is the focus of the discussion below.

[ILR Note: Below, still *quoting*, we **present the eight COIN principles** as presented in Joshua T. White’s paper, **and then present actions which the Pakistani government could, in cooperation with the United States, undertake.**]

(I) A long-term political strategy focused on creating a viable, sustainable stability—through building or enhancing local government effectiveness and legitimacy—while marginalizing insurgents and winning over their sympathizers. . . .

Focus intently on building judicial capacity in regions like Swat, and **track monthly metrics on this issue** (cases outstanding, cases resolved, etc.) with the same consistency that it tracks operational military metrics.

Conduct basic field surveys about local grievances, targeted particularly to vulnerable regions of the NWFP in which the Taliban are likely to expand their writ (e.g., Bannu, Buner, Dir, Karak, Kohat, Malakand, and Tank). **These surveys**, conducted every three or six months, **could be used to help the government address high-priority grievances** at the district or tehsil level of which the Taliban may seek to take advantage. . . .

Begin elementary and symbolic reforms in the FATA. . . . Given the long history of hands-off policies with respect to the FATA, **the government needs to find ways to gradually give itself a greater excuse to maintain a presence there.**

(II) Integrated civilian-military effort based on a common assessment of the situation and which synchronizes development, governance, and security efforts to support the political strategy. COIN is said to be 80 percent political, 20 percent military. . . . There is perhaps no other region in Pakistan in which coordination of local security efforts is as complex as in the NWFP/FATA frontier areas. . . . **The first element of civilian-military synchronization in the frontier should focus on the graduated hand-off from civilian to military authorities** in the context of a localized insurgency. . . . **The second element should focus in practical ways on the integration of development, governance, and security efforts. . . .**

Develop distinct planning documents for each major sub-region of the frontier (e.g., the erstwhile Malakand division, Bannu division, Peshawar and environs, Waziristan, mid and northern FATA, etc.) **that outline the ladder of escalation from local civilian authorities to military intervention, and identify gaps in that process that can be addressed in advance. . . .** Local government and police forces are the first line of defense in any counterinsurgency, but the state also needs to plan in advance for a gradual process of escalation, so that it does not under- or over-react to a growing threat.

Consider setting up small demonstration zones in the FATA. . . . in which to focus intently on synchronizing development, governance, and security efforts, consistent with “ink spot” principles of COIN theory. Within these zones, **the government and its foreign aid**

partners could provide substantial and highly visible development, and support population-centric security efforts with increased and better equipped Frontier Corps deployments. . . .

(III) A close and genuine partnership with the host nation government in the lead and which builds self-reliant, independently functioning institutions over time. . . . There has been an increasing trend toward cooperation between the United States and Pakistan in the frontier, most notably in terms of American support for training and equipping the Frontier Cops and the FATA Secretariat. Both of these are worthwhile initiatives and can be expanded. But **attention should also be paid to supporting the newly established Regional Coordination Officer (RCO) mechanisms.** The RCOs are civil officers with authority over multiple districts or tribal agencies, and their broad oversight role has helped to mitigate some of the coordination problems

Expand the resources and discretionary authority of the RCOs, and see to it that they can serve as a focal points for decision-making on law and order issues, as well as a points of liaison in the field between civilian and military/paramilitary leaders.

Reevaluate FATA development programs in light of the need for capacity building and institutionalization within the tribal areas themselves. Focus initially on the provision of government services and the establishment of greater state presence in the FATA.

(IV) Population-centric security founded on the presence of security forces (military and/or police), local community partnerships, self-defending populations, and small-unit operations that keep the enemy off balance and make the people feel safe. . . .

Experiment with equipping and training small units which would specialize in forward deploying into villages; conducting patrols; mobilizing community leaders, particularly local clerics and influential religious figures; and interfacing with local police, civilian officials, and intelligence services. . . . **These units could be set up as part of the regular army structure, or could be constituted as specialized Frontier Corps units** which are embedded with the army during military operations, but which **remain deployed in the area of operation after the army has pulled back to its barracks.**

Create a new rapid response police force, under the command of the relevant RCO, whose primary purpose would be **to come alongside lashkars and community groups in order to promote self-defending populations**—particularly as a strategy for containing the spread of Taliban groups outside of their current areas of control. . . .

(V) Continuity and commitment of key personnel, with sufficient authority and resources to do the job. . . .

Prioritize extended terms for critical civil officers. As it now stands, the posting of District Management Group officers in the NWFP is **often highly politicized,** and officers in critical sub-secretary posts are often rotated far too frequently. . . . **The government could provide monetary and promotional incentives for extended postings** by District Coordination Officers, Regional Coordination Officers, and senior police officials in high-priority districts.

Continue the professionalization of the Frontier Corps. Much of this work is already underway, as the Corps has expanded, and the government has found ways to incentivize postings in its ranks by regular army officers. More could be done on this front, however.

Commanding a Frontier Corps unit is still seen as an undesirable post for career-minded army officers, and the army can do more to create incentives to bring high quality officers into the Corps on rotation.

Work out new military procurement and financing mechanisms with the U.S. government to prioritize COIN-oriented equipment. The current channels by which the United States makes available military equipment to Pakistan, such as the Foreign Military Financing program, are valuable but often inordinately slow, and insufficiently targeted to equipment which is relevant for COIN operations. In this respect, the new Pakistan Counterinsurgency Capability Fund is a step in the right direction, providing the relevant U.S. combatant commander with the flexibility to directly program COIN-oriented equipment and training.

(VI) A strong emphasis on building effective and legitimate local security forces, balanced by the ability to provide direct security to the population (engaging the enemy in direct combat where needed) while these security forces are being built. . . .

Expand training of select army and police/paramilitary units in stabilization operations, with a focus on village-level patrolling; liaison with political, tribal, and religious leaders; targeted use of quick response, high-impact development projects; and making use of local lashkars and ad hoc community defense forces. The bulk of these units, even if heavily armed, should fall under the command of the Frontier Corps or the police, which—by virtue of history and tradition—have greater local legitimacy than the army.

Work to embed Frontier Corps units within larger regular army units operating in the frontier. Increasing the interaction between Frontier Corps and army units in the field may be **one mechanism for promoting the professionalization of the Corps**, while at the same time providing army units with the local expertise that comes from the presence of Pashtun soldiers.

(VII) A region-wide approach that disrupts insurgent safe havens, controls borders and frontier regions, and undermines terrorist infrastructure in neighboring countries (note, this requires alliances with regional allies to be most effective). . . .

Develop technical and political mechanisms by which the Pakistan military can be the lead organization conducting unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) operations in the tribal areas. It is widely acknowledged that the U.S. UAV strikes in the FATA create political blowback for the government of Pakistan, and make it more difficult for the government to take on Taliban organizations without being seen as an American lackey. **While it would undoubtedly be difficult—for technical, political, and legal reasons—for the United States to develop a workable mechanism by which the Pakistani military publicly controlled (even nominally) such operations, such a mechanism could, over time, shift public perceptions about the government's own stake in acting against Taliban groups in the FATA.**

Apply lessons learned from the Border Coordination Centers in the NWFP and FATA to Balochistan. . . . The institutional decision-making apparatus for dealing with border issues in Balochistan is substantially simpler and dominated more directly by the military than it is in the NWFP.

(VIII) A Host Nation government that has a basic level of legitimacy among the population and is willing to make appropriate adjustments to address root causes of the insurgency. . . .

Focus on coordinating political and military operations. Rather than considering peace deals in the context of demonstrated state weakness, such as the recent deal in Swat, **the government should focus on deals that can be made on the heels of demonstrations of relative strength**, such as the recent operations in Bajaur and Mohmand. Such deals are less likely to be seen by domestic and international audiences as “capitulation,” and are more likely to solidify army and paramilitary gains in the long term. It should be noted that **even the best of these deals would probably need to be framed in terms of sharia, and ideally would attempt to respond to the legitimate grievances expressed by the population in question.**

Focus on deals that are geographically limited. . . . A narrowly tailored deal would, on balance, be more likely to address real local concerns; allow the government, along with domestic and international observers, to assess the progress and political impact of the agreement; and permit coordination of political and security efforts by the state.

Use targeted development to incentivize political ends. An ancillary benefit of a political strategy that focuses as narrowly as possible on specific regions and specific Taliban groups is that it **enables the state to use targeted development programs to build its own legitimacy at the expense of that of the insurgents. . . .**

Take local demands for sharia seriously, but also work to delegitimize the religious pretensions of the Taliban. Neither Pakistan nor the United States have invested nearly enough time or resources to deconstructing the myth of Taliban religiosity in the frontier. While the Taliban have developed highly effective radio propaganda campaigns, the government has been exceptionally slow to engage in radio jamming, much less set up credible counter-programming efforts. Nor has the government been effective at taking advantage of the increasingly non-ideological and opportunistic character of the Pakistani Taliban. . . .

The foregoing is Article No. 2 (IL040A02) in the [Insurgency Literature Review](#) (ILR), No. 40, 27 July 2009, prepared by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isincreports@mindspring.com).

[Top of Article](#)

Article 3 [Return to ILR Cover Page](#)

3. “**The Taliban’s Winning Strategy in Afghanistan,**” by Gilles Dorransoro, [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Paper, 2009](#). [KBTSAfghanGW, KBTSPakWT, KBTISstrategies, KBTGStrategies] We *quote* from this document available in full at http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/taliban_winning_strategy.pdf:

A misunderstanding of the insurgency is at the heart of the difficulties facing the International Coalition (IC) in Afghanistan. The Taliban are often described as an umbrella movement comprising loosely connected groups that are essentially local and unorganized. On the contrary, **this report’s analysis of the structure and strategy of the insurgency reveals a resilient adversary, engaged in strategic planning and coordinated action.** The Taliban are a revolutionary movement, deeply opposed to the Afghan tribal system and focused on the rebuilding of the Islamic Emirate. **Their propaganda and intelligence are efficient, and the local autonomy of their commanders in the field allows them both flexibility and cohesion.**

They have made clever use of ethnic tensions, the rejection of foreign forces by the Afghan people, and the lack of local administration to gain support in the population. In so doing the Taliban have achieved their objectives in the south and east of the country, **isolating the IC, marginalizing the local Afghan administration, and establishing a parallel administration (mainly to dispense sharia justice and collect taxes).** In recent months, a more professional Taliban have succeeded in making significant inroads by recruiting from non-Pashtun communities. . . .

[Sealing Afghan border with Pakistan extremely difficult politically and militarily]

The situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate; the Taliban-led insurgency retains control of the strategic initiative, and the IC lacks clear direction. **The insurgency has made significant inroads in the past months, consolidating its grip in the south and east, securing its sanctuary in Pakistan, and opening new fronts in the north.** The situation around Kabul is unclear. **Taliban leaders are now convinced that the IC will soon be compelled to accept the facts on the ground and abandon Afghanistan in a few years.**

Since the Bush administration's departure, the United States has tried to develop a strategy for defeating the Taliban. Nonetheless, the recent initiatives lack coherence and do not offer a credible response to the advance of the insurgency. Worse, while some measures are useful, others are potentially dangerous and could very well accelerate the pace at which the Taliban gain ground. The biggest mistake is to concentrate reinforcements in the south, while failing to react quickly and decisively to stop Taliban inroads in the north, where success now would be readily achievable.

The Taliban's strength explains why the reinforcements sent in 2009 (21,000 troops) cannot beat the Taliban in their southern and eastern strongholds. Sealing the border would be politically difficult, and the burden of doing so would fall primarily on the United States. In addition, it would take time, since the Taliban have the momentum. **Defeating the Taliban would require at least 100,000 new reinforcements as long as the Afghan-Pakistani border remained open to insurgents.**

Neither the United States nor NATO is willing or able to pay the human and fiscal costs of reinforcements at this level. Even if they were, sealing the border would be extremely difficult in political and military terms and would take considerable time. There would also be a risk of the situation in the north deteriorating significantly in the meantime. **Indeed, under the current strategy of concentrating new forces in the south and east, the Taliban will move the insurgency to the north.**

[Taliban have efficient leadership, learn from mistakes, quick to exploit IC weaknesses]

One of the key reasons for the lack of a productive IC strategy is the IC's and broader Western misperception of the Taliban. They are often characterized as "backward," "medieval," and "reactionary," and as an association of loosely organized groups. **The insurgency is perceived as a local problem to be solved locally; the national and dynamic dimension of the struggle is not taken into account.** In fact, the Taliban are quite capable of strategic planning and coordinated action. This means that they will adapt to and counter any moves by the IC.

On-the-ground observations and reliable evidence suggest that the Taliban have an efficient leadership, are learning from their mistakes, and are quick to exploit the weaknesses of their adversaries. They are building a parallel administration, have nationwide logistics, and already manage an impressive intelligence network. . . .

The Taliban strategy has been successful so far. They have achieved most of their objectives in the south and east, and they are making inroads in the north. **The Taliban are unlikely to change their strategy significantly in the face of the U.S. troop surge.** The leadership will probably not concentrate forces to challenge the IC, as they regretted doing in 2005. **The Taliban could decide to exert more pressure on cities such as Kabul, Ghazni, and Kandahar, where they are well infiltrated.**

The bulk of the new IC resources is going to the south to reinforce the existing military apparatus. This deployment will benefit the Taliban: Success is unlikely in the south and the north is left open to insurgent infiltration. The IC is sending thousands of troops to Helmand, for example, which may prompt the Taliban to retreat tactically to the northern part of the province or to Ghor (or Uruzgan) and return later after IC forces leave.

There will not be enough IC forces to take and hold most of the areas now controlled by the insurgency, so the Taliban can leave areas where American troops concentrate and then return when troops redeploy elsewhere. There is no way to force the Taliban to fight when they have a sanctuary in Pakistan or in the mountains. Concentrating U.S. forces in the south will also leave the north open for Taliban gains.

[New IC strategy needed with national perspective on war to halt insurgency's progress]

The insurgency does have weaknesses, though. **The Taliban presence in the north is fragile. If the IC reinforced the Afghan police and military there, the insurgents could be stopped relatively easily.** This will not be the case in one or two years if the insurgency is allowed to grow. In addition, **the Taliban leadership is largely in Pakistan, which makes it susceptible to police operations, especially in Quetta.**

The recent offensive of the Pakistani army after the Pakistani Taliban tried to take over the Buner district indicates that **the main danger to the Afghan Taliban would be a change in Pakistani strategy that would put the Afghan Taliban in the difficult position of having to fight on two fronts.** The results of the current military operations in Pakistan are probably going to weaken marginally the insurgency. But the Pakistani army does not aim to destroy the sanctuary for the Afghan Taliban.

In addition, the more than two million internally displaced people in camps are likely to become radicalized by political movements that exploit the resentment and aimlessness of the young.

Based on this analysis, **the IC should have a national perspective on the war and devise a strategy to halt the progress of the insurgency:**

- **Stop focusing on the local leadership of the Taliban in Afghanistan and focus more on the central command in Quetta while pressuring Pakistan directly to take action there.**

- **Focus new resources in places where the Taliban are still relatively weak:** around Kabul and in the north to counter their strategy of geographical and ethnic extension of the war.
- **The current strategy of focusing the reinforcements in two provinces (Helmand and Kandahar) is risky. The lack of Afghan institutions condemns the IC forces to stay there indefinitely** to prevent the return of the Taliban, especially since the Pakistani sanctuary enables them to conduct hit-and-run operations. In addition, the insurgency could rapidly redirect its resources to the north. Finally, **more reinforcements will be needed in 2010 if this “clear and hold” strategy is to be expanded to other provinces.**

The foregoing is Article No. 3 (IL040A03) in the Insurgency Literature Review (ILR), No. 40, 27 July 2009, prepared by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isincreports@mindspring.com).

[Top of Article](#)

Article 4 [Return to ILR Cover Page](#)

4. “The Irresistible Illusion,” by Rory Stewart, London Review of Books, 9 July 2009.

[KBTSAfghanGW, KBTITheory, KBTIStrategies, KBTZDefinitions] Rory Stewart is the Ryan Family Professor of Human Rights and Director of the Carr Center on Human Rights Policy at Harvard. From http://www.lrb.co.uk/v31/n13/stew01_.html we *quote*:

. . . **Barack Obama**, in a recent speech, [stated that the] **Afghan government**:

“ . . . is undermined by corruption and has difficulty delivering basic services to its people. The economy is undercut by a booming narcotics trade that encourages criminality and funds the insurgency . . . **If the Afghan government falls to the Taliban—or allows Al-Qaeda to go unchallenged—that country will again be a base for terrorists who want to kill as many of our people as they possibly can** For the Afghan people, **a return to Taliban rule would condemn their country to brutal governance, international isolation, a paralyzed economy, and the denial of basic human rights to the Afghan people—especially women and girls.** The return in force of Al-Qaeda terrorists who would accompany the core Taliban leadership would cast Afghanistan under the shadow of perpetual violence.”

[Obama’s new Afghanistan policy has narrow focus with broad definition of how to fix it]

Every Afghan ruler in the 20th century was assassinated, lynched, or deposed. The Communist government tried to tear down the old structures of mullah and khan; the anti-Soviet jihad set up new ones, bolstered with U.S. and Saudi cash and weapons supplied from Pakistan. **There is almost no economic activity in the country**, aside from international aid and the production of illegal narcotics. **The Afghan army cannot, like Pakistan’s, reject America’s attempt to define national security priorities;** Afghan diplomats cannot mock our pronouncements. **Karzai is widely criticized, but more than seven years after the invasion there is still no plausible alternative candidate;** there aren’t even recognizable political parties.

Obama's new policy has a very narrow focus—counterterrorism—and a very broad definition of how to achieve it: no less than the fixing of the Afghan state.

He presents this in a formal syllogism. **“The final goal in the region is to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future.” A necessary condition of the defeat of Al-Qaeda is the defeat of the Taliban because “if the Afghan government falls to the Taliban . . . that country will again be a base for terrorists who want to kill as many of our people as they possibly can.”**

Such efforts are hampered by the nature of the Afghan economy and government. **We must implement a counterinsurgency strategy, which includes “the deployment of 17,000 troops [to] take the fight to the Taliban in the south and the east” but also adopt a more ‘comprehensive approach,’** aiming to “promote a more capable and accountable Afghan government . . . advance security, opportunity, and justice . . . [and] develop an economy that isn't dominated by illicit drugs.”

Finally, **Afghanistan cannot be addressed without addressing Pakistan: “To defeat an enemy that heeds no borders or laws of war, we must recognize the fundamental connection between the future of Afghanistan and Pakistan.”** Or, in the pithier statement made by Obama last October: “In order to catch Osama bin Laden we have to win in Afghanistan and stabilize Pakistan.”

Obama, then, combines a negative account of Afghanistan's past and present—he describes the border region as “the most dangerous place in the world”—with an optimism that it can be transformed. He assumes that we have a moral justification and obligation to intervene, that the U.S. and its allies have the capacity to address the threat, and that our global humanitarian and security objectives are consistent and mutually reinforcing.

Afghanistan was “the right war.” In Iraq, one could criticize the breaking of international law, the lies about weapons of mass destruction, the apparent corruption of contractors, the anarchy in Baghdad, and the torture at Abu Ghraib. **But the intervention in Afghanistan was a response to 9/11, sanctioned by international law and a broad coalition; the objectives were those of self-defense and altruism.** Al-Qaeda has killed and continues to try to kill innocent citizens, and it is right to prevent them. It is also right to defeat the Taliban, to bring development and an effective legitimate state to Afghanistan, and to stabilize Pakistan. **The elected Afghan government and the majority of the Afghan people support our presence. And the international community has the capacity to transform the situation.**

[Afghani political players, state structures much more fragile than those in Iraq]

Policymakers perceive Afghanistan through the categories of counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, state-building, and economic development. These categories are so closely linked that you can put them in almost any sequence or combination. You need to defeat the Taliban to build a state and you need to build a state to defeat the Taliban. There cannot be security without development, or development without security. If you have the Taliban you have terrorists, if you don't have development you have

terrorists, and as Obama informed the New Yorker, “If you have ungoverned spaces, they become havens for terrorists.”

These connections are global: In Obama’s words, “our security and prosperity depend on the security and prosperity of others.” Or, as a British foreign minister recently rephrased it, “our security depends on their development.” Indeed, **at times it seems that all these activities—building a state, defeating the Taliban, defeating Al-Qaeda, and eliminating poverty—are the same activity. The new U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps counterinsurgency doctrine sounds like a World Bank policy document**, replete with commitments to the rule of law, economic development, governance, state-building, and human rights. In Obama’s words, “security and humanitarian concerns are all part of one project.”

This policy rests on misleading ideas about moral obligation, our capacity, the strength of our adversaries, the threat posed by Afghanistan, the relations between our different objectives, and the value of a state. Even if the invasion was justified, that does not justify all our subsequent actions. If 9/11 had been planned in training camps in Iraq, we might have felt the war in Iraq was more justified, but our actions would have been no less of a disaster for Iraqis or for ourselves.

The power of the U.S. and its allies, and our commitment, knowledge, and will, are limited. It is unlikely that we will be able to defeat the Taliban. The ingredients of successful counterinsurgency campaigns in places like Malaya—control of the borders, large numbers of troops in relation to the population, strong support from the majority ethnic groups, a long-term commitment, and a credible local government—are lacking in Afghanistan.

General David Petraeus will find it difficult to repeat the apparent success of the surge in Iraq. There are no mass political parties in Afghanistan and the Kabul government lacks the base, strength, or legitimacy of the Baghdad government. **Afghan tribal groups lack the coherence of the Iraqi Sunni tribes and their relation to state structures:** they are not being driven out of neighborhood after neighborhood and they do not have the same relation to the Taliban that the Sunni groups had to “Al-Qaeda in Iraq.” Afghans are weary of the war but the Afghan chiefs are not approaching us, seeking a deal. **Since the political players and state structures in Afghanistan are much more fragile than those in Iraq, they are less likely to play a strong role in ending the insurgency.**

[The Taliban are very unlikely to take over Afghanistan as a whole]

Meanwhile, **the Taliban can exploit the ideology of religious resistance** that the West deliberately fostered in the 1980s to defeat the Russians. **They can portray the Kabul government as U.S. slaves, NATO as an infidel occupying force, and their own insurgency as a jihad. Their complaints about corruption, human rights abuses, and aerial bombardments appeal to a large audience.** They are attracting Afghans to their rural courts by giving quicker and more predictable rulings than government judges.

Like some Afghan government officials, **the Taliban have developed an ambiguous and sometimes profitable relationship with the drug lords. They are able to slip back and forth across the Pakistani border and receive support there.** They have massacred Alokzai elders who tried to resist them. **They are mounting successful**

attacks against the coalition and the Afghan government in the south and east. **They are operating in more districts than in 2006** and control provinces, such as Wardak, which are close to Kabul. **They have a chance of retaking southern district towns** such as Musa Qala **and perhaps even some provincial capitals.**

But the Taliban are very unlikely to take over Afghanistan as a whole. Their previous administration provided basic road security and justice but it was fragile and fell quickly. They are no longer perceived, as they were by some in 1994, as young student angels saving the country from corruption. **Millions of Afghans disliked their brutality, incompetence, and primitive attitudes. The Hazara, Tajik, and Uzbek populations are wealthier, more established, and more powerful than they were in 1996** and would strongly resist any attempt by the Taliban to occupy their areas.

The Afghan national army is reasonably effective. Pakistan is not in a position to support the Taliban as it did before. It would require far fewer international troops and planes than we have today to make it very difficult for the Taliban to gather a conventional army as they did in 1996 and drive tanks and artillery up the main road to Kabul.

Even if—as seems most unlikely—the Taliban were to take the capital, it is not clear how much of a threat this would pose to U.S. or European national security. Would they repeat their error of providing a safe haven to Al-Qaeda? And how safe would this safe haven be? They could give Al-Qaeda land for a camp but how would they defend it against Predators or U.S. Special Forces? **And does Al-Qaeda still require large terrorist training camps to organize attacks?** Could they not plan in Hamburg and train at flight schools in Florida; or meet in Bradford and build morale on an adventure training course in Wales?

[Troop reductions and turning away from state-building should not mean total withdrawal]

Furthermore, **there are no self-evident connections between the key objectives of counterterrorism, development, democracy/state-building, and counterinsurgency.** Counterinsurgency is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for state-building.

You could create a stable legitimate state without winning a counterinsurgency campaign (India, which is far more stable and legitimate than Afghanistan, is still fighting several long counterinsurgency campaigns from Assam to Kashmir). **You could win a counterinsurgency campaign without creating a stable state** (if such a state also required the rule of law and a legitimate domestic economy). **Nor is there any necessary connection between state formation and terrorism.** Our confusions are well-illustrated by the debates about whether Iraq was a rogue state harboring terrorists (as Bush claimed) or an authoritarian state which excluded terrorists (as was in fact the case).

It is impossible for Britain and its allies to build an Afghan state. They have no clear picture of this promised “state,” and such a thing could come only from an Afghan national movement, not as a gift from foreigners. Is a centralized state, in any case, an appropriate model for a mountainous country, with strong traditions of local self-government and autonomy, significant ethnic differences, but strong shared moral values? And even were stronger central institutions to emerge, would they assist Western national security objectives?

Afghanistan is starting from a very low base: 30 years of investment might allow its army, police, civil service, and economy to approach the levels of Pakistan. But Osama bin Laden is still in Pakistan, not Afghanistan. He chooses to be there precisely because Pakistan can be more assertive in its state sovereignty than Afghanistan and restricts U.S. operations. **From a narrow (and harsh) U.S. national security perspective, a poor failed state could be easier to handle than a more developed one:** Yemen is less threatening than Iran, Somalia than Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan than Pakistan.

Yet the current state-building project, at the heart of our policy, is justified in the most instrumental terms—not as an end in itself but as a means towards counterterrorism. Obama is clear about this: “I want the American people to understand that we have a clear and focused goal: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future. That’s the goal that must be achieved.”

In pursuit of this objective, **Obama has so far committed to building “an Afghan army of 134,000 and a police force of 82,000,”** and adds that “increases in Afghan forces may very well be needed.” **U.S. generals have spoken openly about wanting a combined Afghan army-police-security apparatus of 450,000 soldiers** (in a country with a population half the size of Britain’s). **Such a force would cost \$2 or \$3 billion a year to maintain; the annual revenue of the Afghan government is just \$600 million. . . .**

. . . We should not encourage the creation of an authoritarian military state. The security that resulted might suit our short-term security interests, but it will not serve the longer interests of Afghans. What kind of anti-terrorist tactics would we expect from the Afghan military? What kind of surveillance, interference, and control from the police? **We should not assume that the only way to achieve security in a developing country is through the restriction of civil liberties, or that authoritarianism is a necessary phase in state formation, or a precondition for rapid economic development,** or a lesser evil in the fight against modern terrorism.

After seven years of refinement, the policy seems so buoyed by illusions, caulked in ambiguous language, and encrusted with moral claims, analogies, and political theories that it can seem futile to present an alternative. It is particularly difficult to argue not for a total withdrawal but for a more cautious approach. **The best Afghan policy would be to reduce the number of foreign troops from the current level of 90,000 to far fewer—perhaps 20,000.**

In that case, **two distinct objectives would remain for the international community: development and counterterrorism. Neither would amount to the building of an Afghan state.** If the West believed it essential to exclude Al-Qaeda from Afghanistan, then they could do it with Special Forces. (They have done it successfully since 2001 and could continue indefinitely, though the result has only been to move Osama bin Laden across the border.) **At the same time the West should provide generous development assistance—not only to keep consent for the counterterrorism operations, but as an end in itself.**

A reduction in troop numbers and a turn away from state-building should not mean total withdrawal: good projects could continue to be undertaken in electricity, water, irrigation, health, education, agriculture, rural development, and in other areas favored by

development agencies. **We should not control and cannot predict the future of Afghanistan.** It may in the future become more violent, or find a decentralized equilibrium or a new national unity, but **if its communities continue to want to work with us, we can, over 30 years, encourage the more positive trends in Afghan society and help to contain the more negative. . . .**

The foregoing is Article No. 4 (IL040A04) in the Insurgency Literature Review (ILR), No. 40, 27 July 2009, prepared by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isinreports@mindspring.com).

[Top of Article](#)

Article 5 [Return to ILR Cover Page](#)

5. “Funding the U.S. Counterinsurgency Wars,” by Stephen Biddle, Council on Foreign Relations, Expert Brief, 19 June 2009 (<http://www.cfr.org/publication/19666>). [KBTITheory, KBTIIrregWar, KBTGDOD, KBTIStrategies] Stephen Biddle is Senior Fellow for Defense Policy at the Council on Foreign Relations. *We quote:*

As Congress turns to the defense budget, battles over constituency politics and cost overruns will mask a deeper story. **Defense budgets represent the nation’s effort to meet the demands of warfare, and this one in particular reflects an underlying debate over the future of war.**

A younger generation of officers and civilian analysts shaped by Iraq and Afghanistan sees the future of war in low-intensity conflicts with non-state actors. Conventional wars between states are a thing of the past, they argue, **so high-tech major weapon programs and heavy military formations are dinosaurs in a world of guerrilla warfare and terrorism.** The military (and the defense budget) should get on with it and transform to **emphasize the low-tech weapons, cultural skills, and boots on the ground needed for a future of counterinsurgency and nation-building.**

[Conventional methods enabled non-state actors to deeply hurt or defeat state armies]

Traditionalists argue that this low-tech transformation agenda is actually a backward-looking program to win the last war rather than the next one. In this view, **low-intensity conflict is the war of today but not necessarily of tomorrow.** While the United States is bogged down in guerrilla warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan, they argue, **states like China and even non-state actors like Hezbollah are acquiring new technology and innovative doctrines for higher-intensity warfare.**

In this view, **if the United States fails to adapt, the real dinosaur will be the labor-intensive, undercapitalized military we built for the wars of this decade that cannot keep up with the new threats of tomorrow.** Ironically, **the traditionalists are right about tomorrow, but the young Turks are right about today.**

Even if the United States never again fights a state enemy, technological and political change is putting conventional war making in the reach of more and more non-state actors. The **2006 Lebanon campaign**, for example, pitted an Israeli army that had reoriented to low-intensity conflict and policing in the occupied territories **against a non-state actor, Hezbollah, that had acquired modern precision antitank weaponry**

and—more important—**the skills to use it fairly effectively in conventional battle.** Hezbollah gave the preponderant but mis-prepared Israelis all they could handle.

If the U.S. military does not remake itself to maximize effectiveness in counterinsurgency, it could easily lose one or both of today's conflicts with potentially grave consequences.

Hezbollah in Lebanon is hardly the only example. Al-Qaeda fighters in 2001-2002 at Bai Beche, Highway 4, and the Shah-i-Kot Valley in Afghanistan used surprisingly conventional methods with considerable skill, as did Chechen infantry in Grozny in 1994-1995, Croatian separatists in the Balkans in 1991, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka since the late-1980s, and Rwandan rebels in 1994.

These conventional methods enabled non-state actors either to defeat ill-prepared state armies (such as the Russians) or to sell their lives dearly in hard fighting at close quarters. Not all non-state opponents will be capable of this. But some already are—and others will be. **State armies that fail to maintain skills for conventional combat or to exploit new technology of their own can expect to face real trouble against such opponents in the future.**

[**Second military transformation would be difficult—but closer to U.S. historical norm**]

The problem is that the United States is now waging two real wars against actual opponents who do not fight like Hezbollah in 2006 or Croatian separatists in 1991. **The future is one thing—the present is another. The young Turks overproject today's demands into the future, but they get today's demands exactly right. And today's wars are extremely demanding.**

If the U.S. military does not remake itself to maximize effectiveness in counterinsurgency, it could easily lose one or both of today's conflicts with potentially grave consequences.

This means the U.S. military may have to transform itself twice. To avoid defeat in today's wars may require a more thorough conversion to the needs of counterinsurgency, going beyond training and operations (which are already heavily oriented to counterinsurgency) to weapon acquisition programs, military service budget shares, and even the promotion priorities we use to shape the officer corps and its skills. **But the military that results will not necessarily be suited to the demands of the postwar world. Those demands could require a second transformation.**

In this context, **the Obama administration's budget proposal for fiscal year 2010 has it about right. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates** has shifted the balance in this debate toward the young Turks and their emphasis on low-intensity conflict. **While he would still hedge to a degree against high-technology enemies, his focus is on winning the wars of today while accepting risks against the possible wars of the future.** He is thus pushing a necessary transformation—but it may not be the last one.

A double transformation would be expensive, disruptive, and politically difficult. But it would also be much closer to the historical norm for U.S. war making. In the early 1940s the United States created a powerful conventional military virtually from

scratch in order to win a war. It then demobilized it and started over again for Korea and again for Vietnam. This was hardly ideal. But it was also unavoidable.

The traditionalist argument for retaining high-tech conventional capability in the midst of multiple ongoing low-intensity wars is like arguing in 1943 that we cannot transform to defeat Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan without hedging against a future war with the Viet Cong. Budgeting, like strategy, is about choices. In this budget debate, we may have to choose the present over the future.

The foregoing is Article No. 5 (IL040A05) in the Insurgency Literature Review (ILR), No. 40, 27 July 2009, prepared by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isincreports@mindspring.com).

[Top of Article](#)

[Return to ILR Cover Page](#)