

National Security Proposal #2

## Finishing the Job in Afghanistan

**Seven years after al Qaeda murdered more than 3,000 Americans, Osama bin Laden remains at large. Al Qaeda has reestablished a safe haven from which it is once again preparing to attack America. Al Qaeda's Taliban allies are resurgent, threatening stability in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is time that we take the fight to our enemies where they live and are strongest by redeploying forces from Iraq back to Afghanistan, leaning on our NATO allies to reinforce their own forces in Afghanistan, and building capable Afghan security forces.**

### THE PROBLEM

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President Bush has not finished the job in Afghanistan.

Whatever the banners said after the initial invasion of Iraq, the mission in Afghanistan had not been accomplished when President Bush diverted America's attention and resources away from Afghanistan to Iraq. After our forces toppled the Taliban regime, the President turned his attention to grand visions of creating a model democracy in Iraq, and in the process let al Qaeda and Taliban leaders in Afghanistan escape the grip of US forces. As a consequence, Osama bin Laden remains at large seven years after President Bush promised to get him "dead or alive," and we face a resurgent terrorist threat to America.

#### **Al Qaeda is rebuilding itself as a clear and present threat.**

We face a renewed threat today of terrorist attack eerily reminiscent of the summer before 9/11. Afghanistan is backsliding dangerously toward Taliban control. The Afghan-Pakistan border region has become what the country of Afghanistan was before 9/11 – a terrorist safe-haven from which al Qaeda can plan and train for attacks on the United States and our allies, with 2,000 potential terrorists training in camps there.<sup>1</sup> CIA Director Michael Hayden said recently "it is very clear to us that al Qaeda has been able for the past 18 months or so to establish a safe haven along the Afghan-Pakistan border area that they have not enjoyed before and that they're bringing in operatives into the region for training." Hayden indicated that, if the U.S. were to suffer another terrorist attack on U.S. soil, it would almost certainly originate in this border area. Hayden has called the area a "clear and present danger to Afghanistan, Pakistan, the West in general and the US in particular."<sup>2</sup>

#### **We lack the troops needed to defeat the enemy in Afghanistan.**

The U.S. military has made great strides since 9/11 in understanding the requirements for waging an effective counterinsurgent war. One of the central "lessons learned" is that effective counterinsurgency operations require significant troop density. The Army/Marine Corps counterinsurgency manual that General Petraeus helped author sets the minimum effective force requirement at twenty

counterinsurgent troops per 1,000 residents.<sup>3</sup> Adding together U.S., NATO, Afghan Army, and Afghan Police troops, the current counterinsurgency force in Afghanistan is less than a third of the minimum force prescribed by the Petraeus manual.<sup>4</sup>

This shortfall is taking a serious toll, as our commanders have made startlingly clear: “No question, it is an under-resourced force,” said the recently departed U.S. commander, General Dan McNeil.<sup>5</sup> The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff agrees: “[W]e don’t have enough forces there to hold in a classic counterinsurgency.”<sup>6</sup> Our military is playing the same game of “Whack-A-Mole” in Afghanistan that it once played in Iraq – our troops will flush the Taliban from an area, only to see them slip back in after our overstretched forces depart. This has yielded the same poor results and danger to U.S. troops that it did when we were doing this in Iraq. The number of civilian deaths in Afghanistan has risen by 60 percent this year and the monthly coalition death toll in Afghanistan is now actually *higher* than in Iraq.<sup>7</sup>

### **The training program for the Afghan National Police (ANP) is not working.**

Counterinsurgent troop density can be, and in the long run must be, provided by Afghan security forces. But when President Bush directed the military to focus on Iraq, the Pentagon outsourced police training in Afghanistan to a defense contractor, DynCorp, which, according to recent Senate testimony, may have been more focused on running prostitution rings in Iraq than they were on training Afghan police.<sup>8</sup> The effort to build a national police force lags the effort to build the Afghan Army, by about 18 months. The difference is that the military training is handled by the US military, not contractors.. 65% of Afghans say the Afghan National Police (ANP) are “unprofessional and poorly trained”.<sup>9</sup> According to a report by the Inspectors General of the State and Defense Department, most ANP units have less than 50 percent of their authorized equipment.<sup>10</sup>

## **THE SOLUTION**

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### **A counterinsurgent force that is built to win**

The administration may be trying to salvage President Bush’s legacy by throwing everything but the kitchen sink at problems in Iraq, but the reality is that Afghanistan and the Afghan-Pakistan border region are, and always have been, the true “central front in the war on terror.” Our forces are engaged in active combat against Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda and their allies, with the opportunity, with the right resources, to destroy al Qaeda and deny it the safe haven it needs to threaten America. Despite the stakes there, our own military leaders say we are not winning and do not have enough troops to do the job. It is time, at long last, that we fight to win in Afghanistan.

### **Reinforce US troops in Afghanistan**

As the Petraeus counterinsurgency manual makes clear, the only way to respond effectively to the growing insurgency in Afghanistan is with more troops. While moving all the way to the manual’s 20:1,000 ratio in Afghanistan is outside the U.S. and NATO’s current capacity, we could do much better. Afghanistan has 4.5 million *more* residents than Iraq, yet the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan is about one-fifth of the number in Iraq.<sup>11</sup> By increasing the number of American forces in Afghanistan by about 20,000 (bringing our total there to 50,000), we can retake the offensive against

the Taliban and al Qaeda and finally destroy this grave threat.

### **Call on NATO to double its commitment**

After 9/11, our NATO allies strongly supported our efforts in Afghanistan. But this initial support has been sapped by the Bush administration's reckless disregard for diplomacy and clear unwillingness to give priority to the fight in Afghanistan. By refocusing U.S. resources from Iraq back to Afghanistan, we would signal a renewed US commitment to our joint efforts with our allies to confront a common enemy. Demonstrating leadership of this kind is the best way to shore up the resolve of our allies and to secure their renewed assistance in the battle against our enemies.

### **Strengthen and improve training for the Afghan National Police**

Training for the ANP should be taken out of the hands of DynCorp, which not only has demonstrated that it is not up to the task but has stained America's reputation around the world by running brothels both in Iraq and Bosnia. The US Department of Justice, which has experts with years of training experience, should take over the ANP training program. This would help to establish a modern, corruption-free force that can provide day-to-day law and order throughout the country. This new ANP would help battle al Qaeda and the Taliban and other groups who are aiding terrorists and profiting from the massive drug trade in Afghanistan.

## **THE ROLLOUT**

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### Ideas for announcing measures to fix the warfighting crisis in Afghanistan

#### **Press conference with local OEF Veterans**

Go to a veterans' hall and hold a press conference with returned Afghanistan OEF (Operation Enduring Freedom) veterans to talk about the importance of the mission in Afghanistan and the need for more troops on the ground to accomplish that mission.

#### **9/11 Commemoration with Firefighters**

Commemorate 9/11 with firefighters. Pledge never to forget the terror that al Qaeda brought to American soil on 9/11. Remind the public of President Bush's commitment to "get [bin Laden] dead or alive." Call for a renewed focus on the threat from al Qaeda and the hunt for bin Laden.

## **CRITIQUES & RESPONSES**

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### Afghanistan v. Iraq

***We need to stay in Iraq to fight al Qaeda, because Iraq, not Afghanistan, is the central front in the war on terror.***

The Director of the CIA and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have emphasized that al Qaeda is presently planning new attacks against America from their safe haven in the Afghan-Pakistan border region. While the CIA Director has called the al Qaeda presence there a "clear and present danger," he has described al Qaeda in Iraq as "nearly defeated."<sup>12</sup> US military commanders in Afghanistan are making urgent pleas for reinforcements while the Iraqi government is toying with the

idea of asking US forces to leave.<sup>13</sup> Even the Bush administration's Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, told the Senate that, if he were forced to choose between fighting al Qaeda in Afghanistan or Iraq, he would "pick al Qaeda in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area."<sup>14</sup>

### ***We are winning in Afghanistan.***

In June the Pentagon issued its first report to Congress on the status of the mission in Afghanistan. The report concluded that al Qaeda and its Taliban allies have regrouped and "coalesced into a resilient insurgency." The report predicted that things will get worse, not better, this year. "Afghanistan," reports General Jim Jones, former NATO commander and head of two recent commissions reviewing U.S. policy in Afghanistan, "remains a dangerously neglected conflict... Afghanistan and Pakistan are already breeding grounds for insurgency and terrorism, potentially worse than before September 11<sup>th</sup>."<sup>15</sup>

### ***Afghanistan is just like Iraq. We should bring our troops home.***

Unlike Iraq, Afghanistan gave sanctuary to those who attacked the United States on 9/11 and is still a breeding ground for terrorists and terrorist plots. We must establish a stable society before we leave, or we will have to return in a few years. Afghans overwhelmingly support President Karzai and the non-sectarian national army; almost all Afghans (86%) think overthrowing the Taliban was a good thing; our allies are with us; the United Nations plays a strong role; and 75% of the Afghan people view US forces favorably.<sup>16</sup>

### ***America's military is stretched thin. Where will the troops come from?***

The reason the U.S. has not sent more troops to Afghanistan, despite pleas from commanders there, is clear: there simply are no more troops to send, absent a drawdown in Iraq.<sup>17</sup> America can return to a sustainable deployment rotation for our ground forces and keep a "ready brigade" in reserve to respond to unforeseen contingencies elsewhere in the world if it scales back the number of troops deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan combined from the current 170,000 to 100,000.<sup>18</sup> If we redefine the mission in Iraq to focus on preventing al Qaeda from making Iraq its new Afghanistan, we can draw down to 50,000 troops there, which will enable us to nearly double US forces in Afghanistan.

## Endnote

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Mazzetti and David Rhode, "Amid U.S. Policy Disputes, Qaeda Grows in Pakistan," *NY Times*, June 30, 2008

<sup>2</sup> Hope Yen, "CIA Director calls Afghan-Pakistan border region 'clear and present danger'," AP, Mar. 30, 2008

<sup>3</sup> FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5/1-13

<sup>4</sup> In a country of 32.7 million people (CIA, 2008 World Factbook) to achieve a ratio of 20 counterinsurgents for every 1,000 residents would require a total counterinsurgent force of roughly 650,000. Together with 34,500 U.S. troops, there are presently about 29,500 non-US NATO and other international troops, 40,000 members of the Afghan National Army on duty, and 75,300 members of the Afghan National police assigned (CRS, Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy, June 6, 2008), for a total counterinsurgent force of 179,300.

<sup>5</sup> David Stout and Thom Shanker, "Next year's war costs estimated at \$170 billion or more," *NY Times*, Feb. 6, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> "Joint Chiefs Chairman Mullen says Basra fight does not indicate need for more U.S. troops in Iraq," AP, April, 3, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Mazetti, "Military Death Toll Rises in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, July 2, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Testimony of Barry Halley before the Democratic Policy Committee, Apr. 28, 2008. Available at <http://democrats.senate.gov/dpc/dpc-hearing.cfm?A=42>

<sup>9</sup> The Asia Foundation, "Afghanistan in 2007: A Survey of the Afghan People", by Pawan Sen and Sudhindra Sharma

<sup>10</sup> CRS, p. 35, citing Inspectors General, U.S. Department of State and of Defense. Interagency Assessment of Afghanistan Police Training and Readiness. November 2006. Department of State report No. ISP-IQ0-07-07.

<sup>11</sup> Iraq has a population of 28.2 million (CIA, 2008 World Factbook), and Afghanistan has a population of 32.7 million. In April 2008, there were roughly 146,000 U.S. troops in Iraq and 34,000 in Afghanistan.

<sup>12</sup> Joby Warrick, "U.S. cites big gains against al-Qaeda," *Washington Post*, May 30, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Amit R. Paley and Karen DeYoung, "Iraqis Condemn American Demands," *Washington Post*, June 11, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Ambassador Ryan Crocker, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, April 8, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> The Atlantic Council of the United States, "Saving Afghanistan: An Appeal and Plan for Urgent Action", January 2008, Chaired by General James L. Jones (USMC, ret.), p. 7, and Center for the Study of the Presidency, "Afghanistan Study Group" p.5

<sup>16</sup> WorldPublicOpinion.org, "Afghan Public Opinion Amid Rising Violence"

<sup>17</sup> Yochi Dreazen, "U.S. Struggles to Bolster Afghan Forces," *Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Carter and Paul Glastis, "The Case for a Draft," *Washington Monthly*, March 2005 put the number troops that can be deployed to the two wars on a sustainable basis at 80,000. BG Kevin Ryan (USA ret), Senior Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, estimates that the Army and Marine Corps can sustainably deploy 10 brigades plus support units (roughly 100,000 troops) in Iraq and 2 brigades and support (about 20,000) in Afghanistan, for a sustainable deployment force of roughly 120,000. (Email from Ryan to Scott Payne, June 19, 2008) We have settled on 100,000 troops as an estimate that is comfortably within this range, allowing for a 3:1 dwell-to-deployment ratio and the maintenance of a ready brigade in reserve.