



GRAND STRATEGY IN THE AFGHAN, PAKISTAN, AND IRAQ WARS:

The End State Fallacy

October 14, 2010

Anthony H. Cordesman
Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy
acordesman@gmail.com

Grand strategy is not an American strength, and it is far too easy to become obsessed with day-to-day issues. In the case of Iraq, this means a focus on US withdrawal and the formation of a new Iraqi government. In the case of Afghanistan and Pakistan, it means a focus on the status of reconciliation talks, whether the current strategy in Afghanistan will work in achieving short term goals like “Afghan good enough,” and whether Pakistan will become a true partner in the ongoing fighting in its border areas.

The cost of wars in blood and dollars, however, can only be justified by their grand strategic outcome over time, and not by whether enough progress can be made to claim a temporary victory or pull out most of our troops. We need to look further into the future in all three of our current wars, or we risk making all of them an exercise in futility. We cannot predict the future, but a successful grand strategy requires, at the least, that we look at the four most likely outcomes in each conflict, and prepare for them as best we can.

Achieving a Meaningful Grand Strategic Outcome in Iraq and the Region

Iraq is already a case in point. We have not yet achieved any meaningful form of positive strategic result in the Iraq War, and we may end in a major grand strategic defeat. We have effectively removed Iraq’s capability to contain and counter Iran without having created a stable or effective Iraq government and political system. We have not moved Iraq’s economy towards stability and development, or produced a lasting end to Iraq’s sectarian and ethnic divisions or the threat posed by Al Qaeda in Iraq and other hard-line, violent extremist groups. Iran’s influence in Iraq may end up rivaling or surpassing ours, and our efforts at strategic partnership remain dependent on an Iraqi government that does not yet exist and cannot become stable or effective in less than half a decade.

The fact remains, however, that Iraq is a truly vital national security interest of the United States, and of all its friends and allies:

- Iraq can play a critical role in limiting Iranian influence, and Iran’s ability to threaten and intimidate its Gulf neighbors. A stable, friendly Iraq can help separate Iran and Syria, provide Turkey with a key alternative to economic involvement with Iran, show the Southern Gulf states that Iran cannot dominate the Northern Gulf or expand to the south, and help secure friendly states like Egypt, Israel, and Jordan.
- A stable and secure Iraq will show that Sunni and Shi’ite can cooperate and defuse the threat of Sunni Islamic extremists and terrorists, as well as the kind of Shi’ite extremism supported by Iran. It can play a critical role in giving the Kurds the future they deserve and integrating the Kurds into the region. If it receives continuing support from the US and the West, this will show that we are fighting extremism, not Arabs or Islam. It will play this role in a region of a far greater strategic interest for the US than Central and South Asia.

- While the US Department of Energy is more realistic about the rate at which Iraq can expand its oil production than Iraq's Oil Ministry and various oil companies, it still projects that Iraq will expand its oil production from 2.4 million barrels per day in 2008 to 2.6 in 2015, 3.1 in 2020, 3.9 in 2025, 5.1 in 2030, and 6.1 in 2035. This expansion is critical in offsetting declines in the production of other major exporting states, and could be substantially quicker in a more stable Iraq – reaching 6.3 MMBD in 2030 and 7.6 MMBD in 2035.
- Iraq can play a key role in securing the entire Gulf, in cooperation with US forces and the forces of the Southern Gulf states. It plays a role in ensuring the stable flow of oil and gas exports throughout the region. Even using highly favorable projections of alternative fuels and liquids, the Department of Energy estimates that the Gulf will continue to increase its share of total world conventional and unconventional liquids production from 28% of all world production in 2008 to 31% in 2035. The Department estimates that this total could be as high as 35% by 2035.

Iraq versus Iran: Early 2003 versus 2010

<u>Category</u>	<u>2003</u>			<u>2010</u>		
	Iraq	Iran	Force Ratio	Iraq	Iran	Force Ratio
Active Manpower	424,000	513,000	8:10	191,957	523,000	2:5
Reserve Manpower	650,000	350,000	19:10	0	350,000	NA
Main Battle Tanks	2,200	1,565	7:5	149	1,613	1:10
OAFVs	1,300	815	8:5	505	725	7:10
APCs	2,400	590	4:1	1,479	650	23:10
Towed Artillery	1,900	2,085	9:10	0	2,010	NA
SP Artillery	150	310	1:2	0	310	NA
MRLs	200	889	1:5	0	876	NA
Combat Aircraft	316	283	11:10	0	312	NA
Attack Helicopters	100	85	6:5	0	50	NA
Major SAM Launchers	225	205	11:10	0	234	NA

Source: Adapted from the IISS Military Balance and Jane's Sentinel series.

Planning for the Lack of a Meaningful End State in Iraq

We may still be able to achieve a lasting grand strategic victory, but not if we treat Iraq as if there was some form of “end state,” rather than the need for a continuing strategic effort that will take as long as it takes – and probably at least through 2020. In fact, our pursuit of the “end state fallacy” may soon lose the war in grand strategic terms. President Obama has claimed combat operations are over. US forces are steadily being drawn down to exit at the end of 2011. Most existing aid funding is spent, and the Congress has shown strong indications of being unwilling to fund limited State and Department of Defense efforts in the future.

The US is, however, scarcely the dominant variable. We may well lose the Iraq War for other reasons. Iraq's internal politics may implode either violently or in the form of failed governance, Iran may be able to dominate a future Shi'ite government, and Iraq's tenuous stability and security may fail for internal Iraq reasons. If, however, we want a meaningful and lasting victory in the Iraq War, an Iraq that helps to contain Iran, and security in the flow of Gulf oil exports, we need to firmly understand that so far we have won exactly nothing.

Iraq is at least half a decade away from defeating its insurgents, putting a stable end to its sectarian and ethnic tensions, developing effective governance, and beginning to create an economy that can meet Iraqi expectations and raise Iraq's per capita income from one of the lowest in the world to one that can underpin stability. Iraq may have vast petroleum resources in the ground, but it is now one of the poorest countries in the world. The CIA estimates that Iraq ranks 158th out of 227 countries in the world in per capita GDP, and compares to 91st for Iran, the next poorest Gulf oil state, 61st for Saudi Arabia, and 2nd for Qatar.

We don't yet know whether Iraq's new government will be friendly enough to want a strategic partnership, or stable and effective enough to make one work. What we do know is that Iraq is far from over its internal problems, and we have not yet won anything in grand strategic terms. If we don't maintain strong presence, if the State Department does not have sufficient funding to aid Iraq in improving its economy and governance, if Defense cannot maintain a strong advisory presence and offer aid to Iraq in rebuilding its military forces to the point where it can defend the nation, we throw away any chance at turning what has so far been a tactical victory into one that has any lasting meaning.

The end result is that the only thing we can predict with absolute certainty is that we will not have achieved our transformational goals in Iraq when we withdraw in 2010 except for toppling Saddam Hussein, and creating an unstable and faction-torn democracy. No one can predict the future, but it is clear that Iraq could move forward in radically different ways:

- ***Everything works out all right: The Pangloss Solution:*** Iraq emerges with a truly national government that succeeds in removing the causes of sectarian and ethnic violence, achieves successful momentum in moving towards economic development, rapidly becomes a major oil exporter, rebuilds military forces capable of defending the nation without threatening Iraq's neighbors, maintains correct relations with Iran without major Iranian influence, becomes a strategic partner of the US, and develops close relations with its Gulf and other neighbors. This scenario is not impossible, but it is scarcely probable (10%?). It also would take 7-10 years, and require strong proactive US support for at least the period through 2013 to 2016.
- ***Iraq Implodes: Everything goes wrong:*** Iraq emerges with a factional, Shi'ite controlled government that cannot achieve effective governance, or resolve its differences with either the Kurds or Arab Sunnis. A new round of civil conflict emerges, dividing Iraq's security forces and leading to a Shi'ite takeover supported by Iran. The shell of democracy disappears and development is halted and declines. The government becomes repressive and must deal with low-level insurgent Sunni movements and the rebirth of Al

Qa'ida in Iraq as a significant force. The Kurds either go back to low-level military confrontation or become a near separatist entity. Oil sector development makes minimal progress. US and Arab influence is minimal. There is no US-Iraqi strategic partnership, Iraq's security forces remain weak and divided, and Iran becomes a key supplier of weapons and military advice. This scenario too is not impossible, but it is scarcely probable (10%?). It would force the US to try to contain both Iran and Iraq indefinitely into the future; and present a far great risk of an Iranian-Iraqi-Syrian-Lebanese security structure, and broader violence between Sunni and Shi'ite. Rather than an end state, it could play out over the next decade or more.

- ***A weak Iraq subject to constant outside struggle for influence:*** Iraq emerges with a compromise government that cannot govern effectively at the national level, and with deep ethnic and sectarian divisions at the provincial and major urban level. There is no cohesive approach to development, or to dealing with Iraq's critical medical, educational, agricultural, and infrastructure problems. The US, Iran, Turkey, and other Arab states compete for influence with no state definitively taking the lead. The Iraqi security forces remain weak and divided, Sunni and Shi'ite terrorist and violent elements maintain a constant low-level threat. The Iraqi people do not trust their government but are locked into ethnic and sectarian divisions and alignments. Iraq becomes stuck in a peculiar form of political limbo – helping to keep the region unstable and making Iraq a constant scene of competition between Iran and a combination of the US and other Arab states. Turkey seeks influence and stability in the north, but the Kurds remain divided and some elements of the PKK continue to operate in the Kurdish areas. Some form of this scenario is all too possible, and has a serious probability. (25%?). The US would be locked into seeking both influence in Iraq and building up outside security structures to contain Iran and deal with the risk of Iran gaining dominant influence indefinitely into the future.
- ***Iraq Muddles Through:*** Iraq emerges with an unstable national government that combines an awkward mix of Maliki, Sadrist, ISCI, Allawi/Al Iraqiya, and Kurdish elements. The central government becomes the scene of constant factional struggles that play out at the provincial and urban levels as well. Enough of a strategic partnership exists between the US and Iraq to slowly build-up effective internal security forces, and counterbalance Iranian influence. Some sectarian and ethnic violence continues, mixed with attacks by the remnants of Al Qa'ida and Sadrist violent spinoffs, but a slow series of compromises resolves the key issues that divide Iraq's along ethnic and sectarian lines over the coming five years. Rising oil revenues help compensate for slow progress towards development. US, Iranian, Turkish, and other Arab competition for influence continues, but Iran's role remains limited. Iraq is more stable and more secure by 2020, but still experiences serious internal problems and tensions. The reemergence of some form of strong man becomes a serious possibility. The US would again be locked into seeking both influence in Iraq and building up outside security structures to contain Iran and deal with the risk of Iran gaining dominant influence indefinitely into the future. This is the most probable scenario: (55%?). It would require strong proactive US support for at least the period through 2016-2020

There are many variations on these themes, and no mix of experts is likely to agree on the most probable forms or the probabilities involved. What should be clear, however, is that the US cannot count on any meaningful end state in any predictable form at any predictable time. It should also be clear that the probabilities of Iraq muddling through or succeeding will be heavily dependent on the kind of continuing US effort and presence

now being proposed by the State Department and the Department of Defense. A combination of five US diplomatic presences, a police training effort, a strong military advisory mission, and a combination of US economic and military aid cannot provide any guarantees for the future. The lack of them, however, would radically increase the probability of the two worst case scenarios, and effectively eliminate the US as a meaningful influence in Iraq.

Iraq and the Broader Strategic Environment in the Gulf and Turkey

It is equally critical to understand, however, that Iraq is only one element in shaping future US grand strategy for the region. Winning or losing in Iraq is only part of achieving any grand strategic outcome. Even if the US achieves the best possible strategic partnership with Iraq, it can only achieve a meaningful outcome from the war by reshaping its military presence in the region, strengthening its efforts at regional cooperation in fighting terrorism, and continuing its efforts to remove the Arab-Israeli conflict as a source of tension between the US and the Arab world.

The US must now reshape its overall strategic posture in the Gulf as it withdraws from Iraq, and find region-wide ways to contain the threat from Iran. It must reassure friendly Arab states in the Gulf, and key states like Egypt and Jordan, that it will remain in the Gulf, keep up its core military presence, maintain a rapid deployment capability, and find a new mix of basing and prepositioning capability. It must show that it will provide new capabilities to deal with the threat posed by Iran's growing capabilities for asymmetric warfare, by its missile forces, and by its chemical weapons and potential nuclear capability,

This requires the US to look beyond the threat that Iran will acquire a nuclear weapon, and consider what overall mix of US military and friendly Gulf capabilities are needed to deter and contain Iran if it builds up a nuclear force over time. It requires a focus on deterring any kind of Iranian military adventure that could lead to Iranian forces threatening or entering Iraq or Kuwait. It requires an estimate of Iran's longer term intentions to build up irregular or asymmetric forces in the region, and particularly to threaten petroleum traffic, petroleum facilities, and other key targets in the Gulf. It means paying close attention not only to Iraqi perceptions and interests, but to those of Saudi Arabia, the other Arab Gulf states, and Israel.

It does not mean planning for war as the only option, but it does mean planning for the fact that war with Iran is possible. It means planning to create new deterrent options like missile defenses. It means tying US grand strategy to the mix of military actions, diplomacy, sanctions, and incentives that will best contain Iran and remove the risk of war while creating a climate in which the US and its regional allies can act quickly and decisively if war becomes the only option.

The US must show that it will be a reliable partner in building up Iraqi military forces; in helping them deal with the threat of terrorism, and in maintaining strong diplomatic ties and trade relations. It must show both Arab governments and Arab peoples that it will

continue to pursue the Arab-Israeli peace process in spite of the problems and obstacles on both sides. At the same time, it must work closely with Britain and France to ensure that there is a common capability to maintain a forward presence and power projection capability.

US relations with Turkey are almost certain to remain areas of major concern. The struggles between the Turkish civil government, military, and judiciary; Turkey's growing focus on the Gulf and Levant; Turkey's problems with Israel; and Turkey's relations with Iran will require the same grand strategic focus over the next decade or more as will creating a new post-war US military presence in the Gulf.

Moreover, the US now faces the reality of an expanded Iranian presence in the Gulf of Oman and Indian Ocean, piracy in the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean; the potential threat of new centers of terrorism in Yemen and Somalia; and continuing uncertainty as to the stability of Djibouti, Eritrea, and Sudan. Iraq is a critical player in regional stability, and while losing Iraq and the Iraq War would be a major grand strategic defeat, US strategy can scarcely focus only on Iraq.

So far, the US has only made preliminary moves to address these issues. The Bush Administration never seems to have considered the need for a regional strategy, and the Obama Administration has never hinted at having one. US CENTCOM has not developed any meaningful form of strategy to deal with these issues on an enduring basis. The US has focused on Turkey and the Arab-Israeli peace issues, but without any clear picture of the overall future it is seeking to create. It has addressed Gulf security issues by working on several key arms sales proposals, and laying the groundwork to make Saudi Arabia even more of a key strategic partner, but it has not defined any tangible program for future military and counterterrorism cooperation with the GCC states, and other key states like Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey.

The US Needs a Grand Strategy for Serving Vital US Strategic Interests in Iraq and the Region

As is the case in its strategy and plans for dealing with Iraq, the US seems to be in a state of partial denial in dealing with the need for a long term US strategic commitment to the region. It focuses on the Iranian nuclear and missile threat by assuming that sanctions and diplomacy can prevent it – rather than on the choice between military action and containment/extended regional deterrence.

Both the President and the Congress also seem committed to political posturing about energy independence in spite of the fact that there is no current probability the US can achieve this until well after 2035 or without a technological breakthrough so radical that no one can now credibly guess at what it might be.

It is all very well to talk about energy independence, and US politicians, academics, media, and think tanks have now been doing so for nearly four decades. The fact remains, however, that the latest *Annual Energy Outlook* (<http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/aeo/>) and

International Energy Outlook (<http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/ieo/>) issued by the Department of Energy project that the US will not make any significant reduction in its strategic dependence on oil imports through 2035.

The reference case projection shows that the US will still import roughly half of its energy liquids through 2035, and the total could be over 60%. The only case that gets dependence down to around 35% is one where real oil prices have risen to well over \$200 a barrel in constant dollars. Moreover, even with very favorable assumptions about global production of new energy liquids, and added production outside the Gulf, the Gulf share of world liquids production still continues to rise through 2035.

Moreover, these projections do not measure the effect of US indirect imports of manufactured goods from Europe and Asia – manufacturers in countries like China and Japan which are far more dependent on oil and gas imports from the Gulf and other exporting nations than the US.

The energy side of US vital interests in the Gulf is driven by four other factors:

- First, it does not matter where the US gets its oil from on any given day. The US competes on a world market driven by total world supply and pays world prices. If a crisis occurs in the Gulf, the US will compete at the same increase in prices as every other importing nation, if world prices rise on a longer-term basis, the US will pay for the same increase, and if supplies are cut by a major conflict, the US must share the oil left for import with other OECD states.
- Second, the US is steadily more dependent on the health of the global economy and the global economy is steadily more dependent on the stable flow of oil and gas exports. Oil prices are not simply a matter of increases in gasoline or home heating costs. They affect every job in America.
- Third, the Gulf still offers the lowest marginal cost for increased export capacity for both oil and gas. The modernization and expansion of Iran and Iraqi production has been limited for nearly three decades. This combined with Saudi Arabia's vast oil resources and Qatari gas; makes the Gulf critical to maintaining and increasing world export capacity over the coming decades. US security interests are not simply a matter of current production and current security in the flow of energy exports. They are enduring interest for the foreseeable future.
- Fourth, US talk of energy independence and the emphasis on rushing out to exploit offshore and domestic oil and gas reserves does not offer the US long-term security. It instead amounts to a strategy of "deplete American first." Barring some technological breakthrough of currently unimaginable proportions, the US is better off waiting to exploit its reserves until it has taken maximum advantage of foreign reserves and exports. It not only conserves resources that will become steadily more scarce over time, it benefits from the technology learning curve in exploration and efficiency of recovery, and from prices that push the US toward improved energy efficiency.

Even if one could ignore the cost to the Gulf states and Israel of a regional nuclear arms race, or the problems posed by terrorism, there is no meaningful prospect of an "end

state” in Iraq, the Gulf, or the region. The most the US can hope for is a grand strategic outcome that offers a far higher probability of security and stability than currently exists and that would be even more dependent on the overall mix of US diplomatic and security action in the region than on US success in forging a successful strategic partnership with Iraq. The US may be able to compensate for grand strategic failure in Iraq, but it will be difficult and incredibly costly to compensate for grand strategic failure in the Gulf.

Achieving a Meaningful Grand Strategic Outcome in Afghanistan and Pakistan

The situation in the case of Afghanistan and Pakistan is radically different from the situation in Iraq and the Gulf. The US has a broadly based strategic posture in the Gulf and the Middle East; it has clear, vital strategic interests in the region; and it has strong allies and regional friends. The US has only a very uncertain strategic posture in Afghanistan and Pakistan; it has only limited strategic interests in the region; and it has powerful potential rivals like China and Russia whose strategic interests are critical to them.

What Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq do have in common is that there is no credible end state to the fighting in either Afghanistan or Pakistan that can give the US a credible grand strategic victory or stable outcome. Any credible form of politico-military victory against Al Qa’ida’s presence in the area, and against the Taliban and other insurgents, still leaves two highly unstable states. It does not bring regional stability, and it does not ensure that new centers of violent extremism and terrorism cannot reemerge in either country, elsewhere in the region, or in other parts of Central Asia, Africa, or the Middle East.

These uncertainties are not an argument for abandoning the war before it is clear whether the US can achieve a cost-effective victory with a new strategy it is still in the process of fully implementing. There is no question that the US will be better off *if* it can achieve enough of a victory so that both countries are far more stable and secure than they are today, and if Al Qa’ida ceases to be a major force in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. As is the case in Iraq and the Gulf region, however, it will be at least a decade before any mix of tactical and strategic victories in the current fighting can be transformed into stable governments, economies and security structures.

Dealing with Afghanistan

Afghanistan’s future is even more uncertain than that of Iraq, and any form of meaningful stability and security is even harder to predict. The Administration and the Congress can debate deadlines for beginning US withdrawal like mid-2011, but it will take far more strategic patience than this to achieve any form of success. *If* the US and ISAF are successful in implementing the new strategy, it may be possible to largely withdraw US forces by 2015-2016, but this kind of date is uncertain and conditions based.

The adaptability and endurance of the Taliban and other insurgents are highly unpredictable. History shows that insurgencies collapse and implode, or endure and evolve, with equal frequency and unpredictability. At the same time, host country governments and forces take time to achieve stability and capability or collapse with equally little warning. Real world economic development, improvements in governance, and advances in justice systems and human rights move at the pace given states permit – never at pace that is *r* a triumph of hope over experience.

Any form of “winning” – including the near total withdrawal of US combat troops -- means the US will have to help finance Afghan governance, development, and almost all of the costs of Afghan security forces for half a decade more into the future. Afghanistan must deal with the impact of more than 30 years of war and internal crisis, an economy which ranks 201st in the world in terms of per capita income and has substantial numbers of Afghan’s below the subsistence level and dependent on UN food aid. The US Census Bureau estimates that Afghanistan’s population, which grew from 15 million when the Soviet Union invaded in 1979 to 29 million in 2010, will reach 39 million in 2025. For all the talk of foreign aid and development, it will be well over a decade before Afghanistan can hope to make serious progress with continued US support and aid.

Like Iraq, Afghanistan could move forward in radically different ways:

- ***Everything works out all right: The Pangloss Solution:*** The Karzai government makes the necessary reforms to reduce corruption and steadily build up Afghan capacity for governance and the presence of the government in the field. It develops an effective and coordinated approach to mid and long-term development in coordination with international donors, while it works with ISAF and the PRTS to create an effective mix of governance, prompt justice, services, and economic development in the field. Member countries maintain the core military presence needed to implement the new strategy, improve civil-military coordination and provide NTM-A with all of the trainers and advisors necessary to build an enduring and fully capable mix of Afghan security forces. The US, ISAF, and GIRoA demonstrate that the new strategy works by mid-2011. Pakistan cooperates enough to reduce insurgent sanctuaries to minimal levels. Taliban and insurgent gains are decisively reversed during 2012-2014, and the Taliban and other insurgents collapse under the pressure of military action, popular disaffection, and internal power struggles. Afghan forces take over security responsibility, and US and other ISAF forces largely leave during 2015. (10% probability?)
- ***Afghanistan Implodes: Everything goes wrong:*** The Karzai government remains corrupt and ineffective and loses the support of the people. The new ISAF strategy fails or is not given time to work, and allied countries do not maintain their forces and provide the necessary transfer and support for the ANSF. Aid donors remain uncoordinated, and often ineffective, and UNAMA continues to fail in virtually every aspect of its mission. Wasteful and corrupt US and allied aid and military contracting remain critical problems. Pakistan sees US and ISAF’s departure as inevitable and exploits the situation to its own perceived advantage. The pressure for political accommodation of any kind, and US and allied withdrawal, leads Karzai to negotiate a settlement with the Taliban and other insurgents that effectively give them control. The shell of an Afghan government may or may not remain, but the Taliban takes over most of the Pashtun territory, with limited power broker holdouts in the north and west. Russia and China attempt to fund them as a

buffer. The resulting Taliban “victory” is seen as a major victory for Al Qa’ida as well, greatly increasing its influence in the Gulf and fragile states like Yemen and Somalia. The US, not NATO is blamed for the loss of Afghanistan; and US influence is weakened throughout the world. This scenario is not impossible, but is not probable (20%?).

- ***A weak Afghanistan remains incapable of surviving without enduring US support:*** The Karzai government makes only marginal improvements in reducing corruption, and in providing security, services, prompt justice and economic help to the people. The government’s practical presence remains an awkward mix of officials and power brokers. Most Afghans get what security and aid benefits they can from ISAF and outside donors. The new ISAF strategy fails or is not given time to work, and allied countries do not maintain their forces and provide the necessary transfer and support for the ANSF. The ANSF remains weak and dependent on US military support and funds. Aid donors remain uncoordinated, and often ineffective, and UNAMA continues to fail in virtually every aspect of its mission. The US, however, works with a few remaining allies like Britain to hold things together and limit Taliban and insurgent gains, and maintain the government’s control over key population centers. Pakistan sees an eventual US departure as inevitable and exploits the situation to its own perceived advantage. The pressure for political accommodation of any kind, on any terms, presents a constant risk. Some form of this scenario has a 35% probability, and would eventually culminate in US withdrawal and defeat.
- ***Afghanistan Muddles Through:*** Rather than “Afghanistan good enough,” the end result is “Afghanistan not quite good enough.” The Karzai government makes limited marginal improvements in reducing corruption, and in providing security, services, prompt justice and economic help to the people. This halts the decline in popular support, but does not build high levels of loyalty. Instead, regional power brokers become steadily more important, limiting Taliban and other insurgent influence and control. The ANSF develops strong ANA and ANCOP elements, and they and a mixture of local police takeover a significant amount of the military mission. War fatigue, internal differences, and extremism weaken the Taliban and other insurgents without defeating them. The US and key allies give the new ISAF strategy time to work, and maintain enough forces to provide the necessary support for the ANSF. Pakistan feels the US will stay for at least a while, and reacts to Al Qa’ida and Pakistani Taliban threats in ways that give Afghanistan more security and limit insurgent use of its territory as a sanctuary. The pressure for political accommodation is constant risk, but a moderate one. Some form of this scenario also has a 35% probability, and locks the US, GIROA, and the Taliban into an indefinite war of attrition.

Dealing with Pakistan

As for Pakistan, the problems with Al Qa’ida, and with the Taliban in the FATA-Baluchistan areas, are only the tip of the iceberg. Pakistan has a corrupt and incompetent civil government and political system, a military and intelligence structure with strong Islamist elements, and a crippled, semi-feudal economy and social structure. Its security is shaped by the threat from India, growing internal religious tensions; and additional problems with Deobandi extremists, and hostile movements in Baluchistan and the Sind.

Pakistan’s economy ranks 171st in per capita GDP, and its population has grown from 85 million when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to 184 million in 2010, and

is expected to reach an estimated 228 million in 2025. Pakistan may well be able to work its way out of these problems over time, but it is not credible to assume it can do so before 2020 and it may well take much longer. Pakistan is better off than Afghanistan, but it is also much larger, and its need for US help and aid is much larger. For all the talk of foreign aid and development, it will be well over a decade before Afghanistan can hope to make serious progress with continued US support and aid.

This scarcely means Pakistan will fail, but it does mean that lasting security, stability, and development are going to be an enduring challenge for the foreseeable future. As is the case with Iraq and Afghanistan, there is no way to know what Pakistan will become and the US can only influence – not shape – Pakistan's future. It is unclear whether the present structure of government will survive. It is unclear that any amount of US aid can reduce Pakistani hostility to US involvement in the war. It is unclear that Pakistan will ever trust the US to stay in the war, and serve Pakistan's interest if it does. It is unclear that Pakistan will ever really abandon its efforts to manipulate Afghanistan, and seek to use it against India.

It is unclear how much the Pakistani military will actually be willing to do in fighting Al Qa'ida and the Afghan Taliban. It is possible that Pakistan may eventually come to see Al Qa'ida and the Afghan Taliban – as well as the growth of violent Pakistani Taliban and Deobandi movements – as enough of a threat to fully commit to the war. It is far from clear, however, that this is *probable*. It is at least as possible that Pakistan's present civil government will collapse, and that its military will only do what it absolutely must to avoid US pressure and maintain US aid for as long as the US stays in the region. It also is highly probable that these uncertainties cannot be resolved over the next few years, and that Pakistan's future and stability will remain uncertain through at least 2020:

Once again, there is little probability of a stable end state:

- ***Everything works out all right: The Pangloss Solution:*** The Pakistani civil government resolves the deep, longstanding tensions between political parties, and focuses on the people's needs and the impact of the flood. Deobandi, Al Qa'ida, and Pakistani Taliban efforts to gain influence and control over the state – coupled to their efforts to attack Sufi Sunnis, Shi'ites, and more secular Pakistanis lead the army, the government, and the majority of the people to see them as dangerous enemies and act to defeat them. The government begins to make the reforms necessary to modernize the economy at every level, including the semi-feudal rural areas. Major efforts are made to reduce corruption and build up the capacity for governance and the presence of government services in the field. The Pakistani government develops an effective and coordinated approach to mid and long-term development in coordination with international donors, and works to create an effective mix of governance, prompt justice, services, and economic development in the field. The Pakistani Army realizes it cannot maintain its status, or secure the country, without far more civil-military coordination and efforts to help the people in areas where it carries out counterinsurgency. Distrust and fear of the US are reduced, and effective use is made of US aid, trainers, and intelligence. Tensions with India and Afghanistan remain significant, but the three countries talk and negotiate, and Pakistan comes to see its tolerance of the Afghan Taliban and support of terrorist movements against India as

- posing more of an internal threat – and risk of war – than they are worth. (10% probability?)
- ***Pakistan Implodes: Everything goes wrong:*** The civil government remains corrupt and ineffective, and hopelessly mismanages the relief and reconstruction effort following the flood. The Pakistani military take over, but prove only marginally more effective, and lose the support of the people. The impact of the flood combines with the global recession and severe imbalances in income distribution and development to create a lasting economic crisis and more tension between the Punjab and other regions. Deobandi, Al Qa'ida, and Pakistani Taliban steadily gain in power, along with Islamist elements in the armed forces, eventually leading to a takeover of the state – empowered in part by the impact of US and allied withdrawal from Afghanistan, and unwillingness to sustain aid to Pakistan. A hostile, Islamist, nuclear power emerges that threatens the US, India, and moderate Muslim regimes throughout the world, but which remains largely a regional threat focused on its own internal power struggles. This scenario is not impossible, but is not probable (20%?).
 - ***A weak Pakistan endures ongoing political struggles and drifts towards becoming a failed state:*** The civil government reaches just enough accommodation between parties to avoid another military takeover, but its limited improvements in governance do not address any of the major security and economic issues that weaken and divide the state. Pakistan only makes marginal improvements in reducing corruption, and in providing security, services, education, health, and economic help to the people. The Pakistani Army strengthens its efforts to defeat Deobandi and Pakistani Taliban efforts but they remain a significant threat. It only puts as much pressure on Al Qa'ida and the Afghan Taliban as US pressures – or their direct threat to the regime – require. Distrust and fear of the US remain high and are confirmed by the US/ISAF defeat in Afghanistan, and a sharp drop in US aid. Pakistan supports a limited Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and focuses on the perceived threat from India. Some form of this scenario has a 35% probability.
 - ***Pakistan Muddles Through:*** The civil government make enough accommodation between parties to both avoid another military takeover, and enough improvement in governance to gradually address some of the major security and economic issues that weaken and divide the state. Pakistan also gradually makes enough improvements in reducing corruption, and in providing security, services, education, health, and economic help to the people to sharply reduce the divisions within the country and support for Deobandi and Pakistani Taliban extremism. The Pakistani Army strengthens its efforts to contain Deobandi and Pakistani Taliban violence and puts significant pressure on Al Qa'idi and the Afghan Taliban as a threat to the regime. Distrust and fear of the US remain serious, but continued aid and the US/ISAF willingness to stay in Afghanistan keep up government and Army support. Some form of this scenario also has a 35% probability; it locks the US into indefinite efforts to support the Pakistani government and Army.

Dealing with the Lack of an End State

At present, the Administration seems to deliberately avoid projecting the need for a lasting commitment to either Afghanistan and Pakistan, and providing anything approaching an estimate of the cost of sustaining the war and dealing with its aftermath.

It is also important to understand the costs involved. These costs will be high even if they are measured only in dollars and not in blood. And, the US has now lost more than 4,400 killed in Iraq and well over 31,000 wounded; and over 1,300 killed in Afghanistan and 8,400 wounded.

Sustaining the present US strategy and military effort in Afghanistan and Pakistan over a period long enough to produce a meaningful result could easily raise the cost of the war effort in these countries from a CRS estimate of \$308.3 billion from FY2001-FY2010 by another \$632 billion between FY2011 and FY2020. (President Obama requested \$119.4 billion for FY2011 alone, and costs continue to rise.) This would bring the total cost of creating a credible level of security and stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan to well over \$900 billion, and this compares with a CRS estimate of a total cost of the Iraq War of some \$853 billion from FY2001 through FY2011 – assuming the Congress does fund the President's FY2011 request.

These costs may be worth paying if the new strategy produces definitive indications of success during the coming year, but only if there are credible estimates that (a) the US and its allies will persist to the point of tactical victory and the US will continue to engage in a major aid effort for the following decade, (b) there are convincing analytic estimates to show that the wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan can produce enough enduring security and stability after the US and allied forces leave and the US limits its role to aid, (c) there are convincing estimates to show this investment in counterterrorism and dealing with nuclear threat is more productive than other estimates, and (d) the US cannot achieve more important strategic benefits elsewhere at lower or equal cost. If the Bush or Obama Administrations have really examined these options, they have achieved an incredible level of security in doing so.

At the same time, the Congress is divided over whether funding should be managed according to dealing with the Afghanistan and Pakistan that actually exist, or tied to standards that apply to states that are largely free of corruption and do not exist, and will not exist in the foreseeable future. The US and its allies are pursuing a largely mythical Afghan development plan which lack core credibility in peacetime, much less in war. There is no development plan for a Pakistan (or plan to use US military aid). The US is effectively paying an open ended mix of bribe to a country whose economy is now crippled by a catastrophic flood, and whose main security interest is India and not the war the US wants it to fight.

If one sets aside the flood of spin and official rhetoric, the US seems to have done little or no analysis of the probability that either Afghanistan or Pakistan can achieve lasting stability with a credible level of sustained US effort. Admittedly, no one can predict the future. What one can do is examine possible futures, and no one in either the Bush or the Obama Administrations seems to have done this in a meaningful form – or at least in a form they have been willing to communicate. If they had, it is virtually certain that the prospects for either US military and aid effort achieving a meaningful level of stability and security in the near term -- by “winning” and withdrawing -- would be negligible. The challenges are simply too great, and the timelines for credible change are too long.

The Uncertain Grand Strategic Cost-Benefits of the Afghan and Pakistan Wars and a Major US Involvement in Central Asia

These issues are particularly critical to future US policy in the wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan because these wars differ sharply from the war in Iraq in terms of their strategic cost-benefits. Afghanistan and Pakistan involve important, but scarcely vital US strategic interests. Containment is not the most desirable option – stability and security clearly are – but containment is an option as is deciding on a far lower US strategic profile in Central Asia.

Neither Afghanistan nor Pakistan has any meaningful value to the US economy. The Cold War is over, and the expansion of Russian and Chinese strategic interests in Central Asia does not threaten the US and involves an inevitable degree of competition that ensures one state does not have dominant influence. Terrorism is an important threat but the fact Al Qa'ida is now headquartered in Pakistan does not mean it has to remain there or mean that Islamist extremism can be defeated even if the current leadership of Al Qa'ida is totally destroyed – the forces at work are so great over so wide a range of countries with large Islamic populations that this threat will mutate, relocate, and reemerge indefinitely into the future.

Touting the potential value of Afghan minerals might be important if the estimate of \$1.4 trillion in value was more than a politicized guesstimate, and if there was some credible chance of stable US benefit from exploiting the resources involved. In practice, however, it simply is not credible that the US will dominate the mining industry in Afghanistan or gain a major role in Pakistan's economy or that of Central Asian states. Even if US-flagged companies somehow did come to play a major role in the region, they could be firmly trusted to hire the cheapest foreign labor available and to do everything possible to avoid bringing their income within the US tax base.

The same is largely true of energy. Central Asia is an important potential oil and gas producer, but it is a far smaller source of energy exports than the Gulf, and its geography ensures that Russia and China have a major advantage in exploiting such resources. At the same time, Russian and Chinese competition – coupled to the ambitions and funding needs of Central Asian states -- will create an environment which leads to the efficient production of cost-effective resources and ease pressure on world supply and world prices.

The US has no reason to subsidize US companies in such efforts, or to give a US role in developing such assets as a strategic priority. Once again, even if US-flagged companies could somehow come to play a major role in the region, they would hire the cheapest foreign labor available and do as much as possible to avoid bringing their income within the US tax base. The end result is that it does not really matter to the US who develops Central Asian energy resources. As long as other states develop these resources, and sell Central Asian oil and gas output at world market prices, the end result will serve US

interests by increasing world supply and cutting world prices. If energy conflicts do arise in central Asia, the US is scarcely in a position to try to resolve them by force.

Central Asia and the Gulf: Comparative Energy Resources

Country	Oil Reserves in Billions of Barrels	% of Total World Oil Reserves	Gas Reserves in TCF	% of Total World Gas Reserves
Central Asia				
Azerbaijan	7.0	0.5	46.3	0.7
Kazakhstan	39.8	3.0	64.4	1.0
Turkmenistan	0.6	negligible	286.2	4.3
Uzbekistan	0.6	negligible	59.4	0.9
Total	48	3.5	456.3	6.9
Gulf				
Bahrain	0.1	negligible	3.0	negligible
Iran	137.6	10.3	1,045.7	15.8
Iraq	115.0	8.6	111.9	1.7
Kuwait	101.5	7.6	63.0	1.0
Oman	5.6	0.4	34.6	0.5
Qatar	26.8	2.0	895.8	13.5
Saudi Arabia	264.6	19.8	279.7	4.2
UAE	97.8	7.3	227.1	3.4
Yemen	2.7	0.2	17.3	0.3
Total	751.7	56.2	2,678.1	40.4

Avoiding the “Great Game”

It should be stressed that these points do not mean that the US should not seek strong diplomatic and economic ties with the region, has no interest in the stability of such states, should not show a humanitarian concern for their peoples, or should not seek to limit any use of such states for the purposes of terrorism. The fact that Pakistan could conceivably export nuclear weapons or fissile material is also a significant risk.

But, this is not a reason to play the “Great Game” in jockeying with Russia, China, and other states for regional influence. It does not make Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the states of Central Asia as important as the Gulf or the same use of resources in closer and more important regions like Africa and Central Asia. It still leaves Pakistan as a strategic sideshow in comparison to India.

Shaping a Grand Strategy for America’s Wars

To deliberately mix a metaphor, tools like the National Strategy and Quadrennial Defense Review have so far dealt with these issues by loudly trumpeting a deafening silence about a grand strategy for our current wars that they attempt to conceal in a fog of spin. The US cannot afford to allow this situation to continue. We need a credible grand strategy with well-defined objectives, resources, and timelines and not just another set of concepts. We need a meaningful dialog between the Administration and the Congress, and a meaningful effort to build lasting public support.

The choices are easier in Iraq and the Gulf. We cannot afford to lose the war in Iraq through neglect and a lack of well-funded effort to forge a meaningful strategic partnership. We also, cannot afford to focus on Iraq – lost or won – and ignore the rest of the Gulf and the region. Our strategy must address the US posture in the entire area, reexamine the nature of our military ties to both regional states and Britain and France, and look at the full range of possible wars from low level asymmetric conflicts to the Iranian-Israeli nuclear arms race that has already begun to reshape Israeli plans and force postures.

The Grand Strategic Reasons Not to Play the “Great Game”

We need to make hard choices about Afghanistan and Pakistan, our future posture in Central Asia, and whether wars against terrorist movements can actually defeat them, or simply make terrorism mutate and relocate. The presently announced US “strategy” in Afghanistan and Pakistan literally has no future: there is no thinking beyond a half-pregnant deadline for withdrawal, grandiose development expectations that can never be met, and vague references to some form of “Afghan good enough.” That does not mean that the same strategy cannot succeed with patience, steady adaptation to meet changing conditions, and continued effort; but there is no current indication of what this would actually mean or what it would cost.

There also is good reason to debate exactly what US goals are in the entire region, and what level of continued US effort is really justified. The four scenarios outlined for each conflict earlier are not complex or subtle. They are basic to any meaningful form of grand strategic thinking. It is also clear that such thinking needs to be carried out in a fundamentally different context from thinking about Iraq and the Gulf. Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia are US interests, but are anything but vital US strategic interests. If the costs and risks remain this high, or continue to grow, this is one Great Game that can best be won by refusing to play it.

Avoiding Limited Wars That Commit the Bulk of US Ground Forces and US Civil-Military Resources to Open-ended Armed Nation Building

More generally, the US must think hard about the lessons of all three wars in making any major commitment of ground forces in the future. Armed nation building is not a form of limited war. It is extraordinarily costly, and ties up large parts of the US defense budget, US forces, and scarce aid and development expertise in extremely high risk commitments to a given conflict whose scale and duration cannot be predicted and run a constant risk of serious escalation and/or failure.

Such cases may be necessary – although it is extremely doubtful that the US would have engaged in any of its three current war if these costs and risks had been properly assessed before or during the initial phase of military and stability operations. The US needs to consider strategies that put far more emphasis on building up host country forces, and the

use of carefully focused US military capabilities like airpower and UCAVs, Special Forces, trainers and mentors, and intelligence assets.

It also needs to be far more realistic about its severe real-world limits as a military “superpower.” The Iraq and Afghan/Pakistan wars have shown that the US now effectively has the land forces for one major regional contingency and no practical prospect of increasing them. These are the same forces that would have to help South Korea in a crisis or any other partner that required US support in a conventional war.

Emphasizing Containment and Building Up Regional Friends and Allies

Moreover, the US needs to look far more carefully at the trade-offs between direct military intervention and a mixture of containment and building up regional partners and allies over time. The best case outcome of US intervention in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan is almost certain to cost at least \$1.5 trillion, and may well cost \$2 trillion – and will not produce a stable end state or grand strategic outcome in any of the three cases.

All three wars raises grand strategic questions about what the US could have accomplished by using a fraction of the money to build up other regional allies, develop more international cooperation in counterterrorism, and developed more advanced power projection capabilities. The answers are far from clear, but blundering into open-ended “limited” wars for the wrong reasons, and/or based on fundamentally wrong perceptions of the risks and situation is not an experience we should repeat.

Forcing Realism on Efforts to Improve Democracy, Governance, Human Rights, the Rule of Law, and Economic Development

At the same time, the US needs to be far more realistic about what it can and cannot achieve in terms of developing effective democracy and governance, human rights and the rule of law, and economic development. There is an unfortunate surrealism that binds area experts, neoconservatives, and liberals into the same unrealistic expectations as to how easily societies and nations can be transformed – although all would dispute the other’s stated goals and rationale. The reporting of SIGIR and SIGAR are a grim warning as to just how unready the civil side of US grand strategy is to make meaningful estimates and plans, and execute successful programs.

Basing Grand Strategy on Integrated Civil-Military Operations

This is not an argument against the US making use of civil programs, or integrated civil-military operations. Quite to the contrary; there is no military answer to most of the problems the US faces, any more than “soft power” is a meaningful substitute for military power in such cases. The US does, however, need to develop both far better civil plans, and ways of creating truly integrated civil-military plans that are based on realistic resources and expectations. At present, it has the facade of such effort, but nothing like the effective substance.

If the US is to develop an effective grand strategy for its current wars, and for the regions where it is now fighting, and for planning its overall strategy, it must do so in the form of detailed and integrated civil-military plans. This is true even when the main focus is “conventional” diplomacy and civil and military advisory efforts. It is absolutely critical when the US becomes involved in any form of armed nation building. A concept is not a strategy at any level – tactical to grand. Neither, however, is the pursuit of an impossible end state. After what soon will be ten years of fighting, it is time we not only learned this, but acted on the lesson.