Afghanistan and the Uncertain Metrics of Progress

Part One: The Failures That Shaped Today’s War

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Overview

The US is scarcely alone in failing to provide adequate reporting on the Afghan conflict. No allied government provides credible reporting on the progress of the war, and the Afghan government provides little detail of any kind. The UN, which has major responsibilities for aid, has failed to provide a meaningful overview of how aid requirements are generated, how aid efforts are managed and coordinated, of how funds are used, of the quality of fiscal controls and auditing, and of the effectiveness and impact of aid.

There are, however, some useful unclassified metrics in spite of the tendency to “spin” and “message control.” Moreover, some reflect real progress since the adoption of the new strategy for the war, which indicates that a more frank, meaningful, and open reporting system would do a far more convincing job of winning support for the conflict – as well as be a way of obtaining the kind of feedback and informed criticism that could help meet the many problems and challenges that still shape the course of the fighting.

The Six Part Series Analysis of the War

The Burke Chair has prepared a six-part analytic overview of unclassified metrics, and of how their current content relates to the challenges in policy, plans, resources, and management of the war that now reduce the prospects of victory. It should be stressed that such an analysis is only a way of flagging key trends and developments within the limits imposed by using unclassified official reporting.

Moreover, metrics are not a substitute for the kind of narrative that is critical to understanding the complexity of this war, and put numbers, charts, and maps in context. This is a case where facing the real-world complexity of the conflict is essential to winning it.

Even an overview of the strengths and weakness of unclassified metrics does, however, provide considerable insight into both what is know about the war, and the many areas where meaningful reporting is lacking and the reporting available is deceptive and misleading. The US, its allies, and ISAF may currently be repeating the same kind of overall messaging as the “follies” presented in Vietnam, but there are enough areas where facts still become public to put much of the war into perspective.

Part Two: The Failures That Shaped Today’s War

This first report in this series ef highlights some of the metrics that reflect a consistent failure to properly resource the Afghan
Overview - II

campaign, and to react to the growth of the Taliban, the Al Qa’ida sanctuary in Pakistan, and the failures of the Afghan government turned near victory into near defeat.

These failures were driven in part by the lack of unity and realism in ISAF, an ineffective UN effort, a US focus on the Iraq War, and by a US force posture whose deployable land forces can only fight one major regional contingency at a time. They also, however, were driven by political decisions to ignore or understate Taliban and insurgent gains from 2002-2009, to ignore the problems caused by weak and corrupt Afghan governance, to understate the risks posed by sanctuaries in Pakistan, and to “spin” the value of tactical ISAF victories while ignoring the steady growth of Taliban influence and control.

The failures involved went much further than unclassified metrics can portray – although some trends are clear and others are illustrated in the future reports in this series. These failures included:

**Mirror imaging of US and European values in trying to create a political system, and central government structure that did not allow for a lack of capacity, effective local and regional government, and a justice system based on Afghan values and practices.**

The end result was a sharply over-centralized structure of government which compounded the problems of corruption; and a focus on national elections without creating effective political parties; a functional role for the new parliament, without focusing on effective governance, and without defining a workable role for the new legislature.

No workable provision was made for funding provincial, district, and local government. The need to keep and expand the remaining elements of the Afghan civil service was largely ignored. The need to adequately deal with Afghanistan’s deep ethnic, sectarian, and tribal difference was “solved” largely by assuming that the President and central government could force a “national” solution on the Afghan people.

**Major intelligence failures:**

As senior US intelligence officers in ISAF later made clear, a gravely flawed intelligence effort initially grossly underestimated that ability of Al Qa’ida and the Taliban to recover and adapt, and then kept focusing on the tactical defeat of the Taliban rather than the constant expansion of its political control of large parts of Afghanistan. Intelligence also did not address the growing unpopularity and failures of the Afghan government, the impact of power brokers and corruption, and role of Pakistan and insurgent sanctuaries in that country.
Overview - III

As some of the maps and graphics in this report -- and in Part Two -- show, this intelligence effort continued to deny reality in spite of the fact that the Taliban steadily gathered momentum, set up more and stronger shadow governments, came to dominate the drug trade, and expanded beyond its traditional power base in the south and east. These errors did not begin to be corrected until April 2009.

It is disturbing that unclassified reporting on the fighting since June 2010 has increasingly been cut back in content and coverage, and shows signs of the same positive spin that has plagued ISAF (and MNF-I) reporting in the past.

Failure to create effective ISAF forces and PRT structures, and coordinate civil-military efforts:

The US initially approached its allies as if they could be little more than peacekeepers in a victory that was already won. It sought the maximum number of participants for aid and security activity without regard to effectiveness and national caveats.

As Parts Three and Four show in more depth, different national military elements were layered over different civil provincial reconstruction teams. This structure could not adapt effectively as the war in Afghanistan became steadily more serious. NATO and ISAF did make progress in military coordination, but they did not begin to develop effective coordinated plans until the McChrystal exercise in 2009, and national caveats remain a critical problem, as does the lack of an true, integrated, civil-military plan of operations.

Moreover, while efforts were finally made to create a central coordinator for civil programs, and integrated civil-military plans in 2010, these plans remain largely conceptual. There still are no meaningful unclassified metrics or analyses that show real progress in these areas, that reflect meaningful fiscal controls and measures of effectiveness, or that provide a picture of how civil programs in governance, rule of law, and economic aid relate to military efforts.

Failure to create effective Afghan forces:

As Parts Two and Five of this briefing show in more depth, no serious effort was made to create effective Afghan forces until 2007, and this effort was never properly funded or supported with anything like the required number of trainers and emphasis on partnership and transition until 2010. These problems were compound by a failure to provide proper facilities and equipment that continued until 2010, and the failure to go from an emphasis on combat units to a balanced force that could operate independently and eventually replace US forces. These trends are documented in further detail in Part Five of this series.
A failure to focus on creating a functional justice system:

These problems were compounded by initially trying to deal with creating a police force that was based on German models that were hopelessly underresourced and did not meet Afghan needs and values. This failure was followed by an equally underresourced effort by the US State Department that largely ignored the fact that insurgent influence now required a police force that could deal with guerrilla warfare. A third transfer of effort then occurred to the US Department of Defense, which began to set more realistic goals for paramilitary and self-defense capability, but was again never properly resourced and effectively increased the burden on the ISAF and US military training effort.

Worse, the police training and expansion effort was decoupled from a rule of law effort that focused narrowly on creating a new formal justice system at the top. This allowed the Taliban and local power brokers to become the de facto system for local justices. Courts and jails were often lacking or unable to operate.

Moreover, the lack of effective local governance – an essential element in winning support for police and a justice system meant all three elements of an effective justice system were lacking much of the country. This – compounded the problem created by corruption, power brokers, and ethnic, sectarian, and tribal friction. All of these efforts were made worse by gross underpayment of salaries, corruption in hiring and promotion at every level, misuse of aid funds, and a lack of any effective effort to manage aid and development programs in the field.

Failure to create effective aid and development programs:

The most striking aspect of aid and development is the lack of meaningful data and metrics on the efforts involved. Output metrics showing the results of aid projects are virtually nonexistent. Ironically, more data are available on military operations and intelligence about the threat than the impact of civil spending and aid.

Parts Two and Four of this briefing do, however, present summary metrics that show the US and the West set up hopelessly overambitious mid and long term development goals based on the assumption that Afghanistan was effectively at peace, without valid plans and requirements, and which can never be resourced at anything like the required levels. (Parts Two and Four of this series show key graphics illustrating the funding gaps involved.)

Unfortunately there are no metrics to show other critical problems in the aid effort – problems compounded by a similar lack of management in military contracts. The result was a massive flow of aid money without effective financial controls, contracting
methods, attention to absorption capability, and without meaningful measures of effectiveness. Moreover, these aid efforts were divided by sponsoring country, often responding to the aid politics of the capital involved, while NGOs funded projects that served their own goals and interests.

As Part Four shows in more detail, these problems were often compounded by erratic funding and a failure to sustain programs once they began. Moreover, major problems occurred because of short tours by key aid personnel, and nearly annual efforts to “reconceptualize” aid efforts without creating systems that could plan and execute concepts effectively, measure Afghan perceptions and needs, validate requirements, and measure effectiveness,

The lack of metric and other reporting on aid also shows the fact that no one was effectively in charge. The UN failed to provide effective coordination and oversight, meaningful reporting on spending, and metrics and analysis that show where aid money went or anything about its effectiveness. Vast amounts of money – by Afghan standards -- poured into a grey economy where side payments and “fees” are the rule. It offered both Afghans and outside contractors a “get rich quick” option at a time they had no guarantee of either security or stability.

This played a major role in creating a massive pattern of corruption and waste at every level. This was compounded by growing military contract expenditures on facilities, transport, and services which also lacked an effective system for awarding and monitoring contracts and anything approaching meaningful fiscal controls.

A central government lacking in capacity – and provincial and local governments controlled from the center and without resources of their own – was steadily corrupted by this process while no effective structure existed at the provincial, district, or local level for planning and executing aid activity. Groups like Oxfam estimate that some 40% of the aid money never reached actual programs and projects, and no element of the aid effort established any meaningful measures of effectiveness to show where the rest of the aid effort went or what its impact was.

Moreover, the metrics that are available on aid show that most of the aid effort focused on mid and long term development. The net impact was that aid did not reach most Afghans at a time the Taliban steadily expanded its control and influence, and often enriched corrupt officials and power brokers. ISAF’s tactical victories often ended in fighting in populated areas, then leaving them. As the following reports in this series show, the population in the most sensitive areas in the war were left without meaningful governance and government services, without a functional justice system and security, and without tangible economic security or benefits from international aid.
Failure to focus on Transition and any form of “End State.”

As is discussed in more detail in Parts Two-Five, no serious effort was made to create and implement a longer term plan to create a mix of Afghan government and security capabilities that could stand on its own, to define goals that would allow ISAF and the US to withdraw forces and limit their military and aid efforts over time. Instead, a constant stream of new policies and plans emerged to the point where the US, ISAF, and other outside actors tended to make every year the “first year” in Afghanistan.

The Need for Credibility, Integrity, and Transparency and Future Reports in this Series

Virtually every expert on the Afghan War could add new points to this list. It is also obvious from many of these points that the metrics shown in this report can only hint at a few key trends and problems. In far too many cases, there are no metrics and no reliable detailed histories – although the kind of metrics and analysis that should have existed are easy to derive from the summary of each problem.

At the same time, it is critical to stress that the other parts of this report show that major progress is being made in addressing many of the issues involved, and metrics are only part of that story. For all of the spin and omissions that still surround reporting on the war, major progress has occurred over the last two years, and additional major efforts to correct these problems are underway.

They will be analyzed in the future parts of this report:

*Part Two: Transitioning to the New Strategy*
*Part Three: Key Ongoing Challenges Part Four: Hold and Build, and The Challenge of Development*
*Part Five: Building Effective Afghan Forces*
*Part Six: Showing Victory is Possible*
Shaping Today’s War:

The Growth of Insurgency from 2003-2009
The Rising Insurgency 2003-2009

• The seasonal rise in major acts of violence was far less important that the growth of Taliban influence to cover much of the country and key population centers.

• US and ISAF won every major tactical clash, but lost much of the country.

• Taliban influence exploited lack of Afghan government presence, Afghan corruption, lack of prompt justice system, dysfunctional aid projects, faltering efforts to develop ANSF.

• US and ISAF lacked the force numbers and civilian aid workers to approach critical mass and have an impact in much of the country.

• Allied countries ISAF denied the scale of the insurgency and the seriousness of its rise. Issued intelligence and other reports claiming success that did not exist.

• Combat metrics did not measure key lower levels of violence like threats, night letters and intimidation, selective attack on tribal leaders, kidnappings, forced marriages, payoffs to young men.

• The US and ISAF remained kinetic through 2009; the insurgent fought a battle of influence over the population and political attrition to drive out the US and ISAF from the start.
The insurgency in Afghanistan has expanded geographically.

The Insurgency had momentum in much of the South and East.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Terrorist Attacks in Afghanistan</th>
<th>Afghan Attacks with at least 1 killed, injured, or kidnapped</th>
<th>People killed, injured, or kidnapped in Afghanistan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>1,557</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>962</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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<td>2008</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>2,126</td>
<td>1,480</td>
<td>7,584</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Counterterrorism Center: *Annex of Statistical Information, Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, Offices of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Department of State 2009
Growing Threat to ANA and ANP: 2006-Mid 2009

**ANA**

**ANP**

The US and ISAF Underreact and Give Priority to Iraq
The US and ISAF Waste Eight Years Losing By Default

• Afghan government fails the Afghan people. Power brokers, militias, corrupt officials alienate the people.
• US, allied, and ISAF failures to control funding and contracts become the driving force that raises Afghan corruption to unacceptable levels.
• No serious effort to address corruption and lack of capability in Afghan government, rise of corruption, and alienation of people.
• US gives priority to Iraq while spinning false sense of progress in Afghanistan.
• Key Allies virtually deny or ignore the fact a serious war is developing.
• Aid focuses on mid to long term programs as if war did not exist, but does not operate outside the increasingly limited areas which are not safe.
• US and ISAF focus on defeating the insurgent in clashes in the field or in ways that threaten Afghans without offering any lasting protection.
• No consistent or meaningfully resource effort to create an effective ANSF.
• Failure to deal effectively with Pakistan creates a second war in a nation of far greater strategic importance.
• No ISAF nation provides meaningful transparency and reporting to its legislature and people.
Enemy Initiated Attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan: May 2003 to August 2009

### Terrorism in Iraq vs. Afghanistan: 2005-2009

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Terrorist Attacks in Iraq</th>
<th>Terrorist Attacks in Afghanistan</th>
<th>Iraq Attacks with at least 1 killed, injured, or kidnapped</th>
<th>Afghan Attacks with at least 1 killed, injured, or kidnapped</th>
<th>People killed, injured, or kidnapped in Iraq</th>
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</table>

Source: National Counterterrorism Center: *Annex of Statistical Information, Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, Offices of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Department of State 2009
US Troop Levels: Under-Reacting and Losing

An Increasing Commitment

Number of American troops in Afghanistan, in thousands.

Source: U.S. Central Command

Planned troop level in November: 68,000
ISAF Troop Levels: Under-Reacting and Losing

Source: NATO/ISAF Placemats
Following the Money:

Iraq Gets It;
Afghanistan Does Not
Funding Iraq at the Expense of the Afghan War: FY2001-FY2011
(In Current $US Billions)

Afghan War Costs Rise as Iraq War Cost Drops: FY2001-FY2011

(In Current $US Billions)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Afghanistan</th>
<th>Enhanced Security</th>
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CRS Estimate of Average Monthly DOD Spending on Iraq and Afghan Wars FY 2001 - FY2011

### CRS Estimate of Annual Foreign Aid Spending on Iraq and Afghan Wars FY 2001 – FY2011

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<th>FY03</th>
<th>FY04</th>
<th>FY05</th>
<th>FY06</th>
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<th>FY10 Supp Request</th>
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* Inc Pending Reqs

# CRS Estimate of Total Spent on Iraq and Afghan Wars

**FY 2001 – FY2011: Cumulative**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY01/02</th>
<th>FY03</th>
<th>FY04</th>
<th>FY05</th>
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The Future Cost of Underspending: Guesstimate of Annual and Cumulative Cost of “Worst Cost” Success in the Afghan War: FY2010-FY2020
(In Current $US Billions)


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--Extremely intense fighting with dropping allied support.
"Supplemental" in FY2010
--Make decisive gains by FY15.
--US and ISAF withdrawal cautiously

--Maintain significant support funding of Afghan forces and government through FY2020 & beyond

--DoD pays cost of police as well as armed forces, and protection of remaining civil & military advisory presence though
How Under-Reaction Shaped Today’s War:
Expansion of combat Areas and Insurgent Influence at the End of 2009
Prelude to a New Strategy
Key Security Trends: 2009-2010

• DoD reports insurgents perceived 2009 as their most successful year.
• DoD recorded more than 21,000 enemy-initiated attacks in 2009—a 75% increase over the number recorded in 2008.
• From September 2009 to March 2010:
  • Attacks against coalition forces were up 83%, compared with the same time period one year earlier
  • Attacks against civilians were up 72%,
  • Attacks against the ANSF were up 17%,
• Insurgent now have shadow governments in every province but Kabul; have active influence in more districts than Afghan government.
• Election crisis highlights lack of popular confidence in government; impact of corruption and power brokering.
• Growth in dollar value of GDP disguise critical hardship and lack of effective distribution of income. Nearly one-third of population is below subsistence and dependent on aid from UN food program.

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report, July 2010, p. 66.
Taliban Influence and Military Activity Coincided with Population Density

Source: globalsecurity.org
Where the Fighting Was: End 2009

Afghanistan Security Incidents
January – October 2009

Sources: Afghanistan JOIS NATO SIGACTS data.
71% of initiated security incidents occurred in 10% of total districts.
But the Fighting Was Only Part of the Story: Insurgent Influence & Capability by District: End-2009

Sources: Afghanistan JOLIS NATO SIGACTS data through 30 Sep 09.
Losing the War? Security Situation as the New Strategy Begins to be Implemented

• In June 2010, the Acting Minister of Interior told the press that only 9 of Afghanistan’s 364 districts were considered safe.

• IJC reported that attacks were up by 53% over last quarter; however, DoD reported that this was due to the increased presence of ISAF troops in areas they had not previously occupied.

• IJC reported 6,880 attacks on the ANSF, coalition forces, and civilians:
  - 3,918 direct fire attacks
  - 1,026 indirect fire attacks
  - 1,428 improvised explosive device (IED) attacks
  - 508 complex attacks

• Nearly half of all direct fire attacks occurred in Helmand.

• Armed clashes and IED incidents accounted for one-third of incidents reported.

• The rate of IED attacks within the first four months of 2010 was 94% higher than during the same period in 2009. According to IJC, 1,449 IEDs were identified and cleared during the quarter about the same number as last quarter.

• On average, about three suicide attacks occurred per week-half of which were carried out in the southern region. Complex suicide attacks occurred at an average rate of two per month, double the figure recorded in 2009.

• In addition, insurgents assassinated approximately seven people per week (mainly in the southern and southeastern areas where Operation Moshtarak has been under way since February)-45% increase over the same period in 2009. In the city of Kandahar, assassinations targeted civil servants, clerics, and elders.

• Direct fire attack: Any engagement or attack initiated with only direct fire weapons.
• Indirect fire attack: Engagements and attacks involving indirect fire weapons systems, including mortars, rockets, etc.; does not involve other weapons.
• IED attack: An incident caused by the detonation of an improvised explosive device.
• Complex attack: Any engagement involving a combination of weapon deployment systems, such as direct fire following an IED attack or a direct attack following a mortar attack.

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report, July 2010, p. 57-58
Key Elements of Progress Since 2009
Progress in Many Key Areas - I

- Clear recognition of the seriousness of the war, and that it must be won on a population-centric, rather than kinetic level.

- Viable approach to strategy that can deal with the realities of this war and is flexible and adaptive enough to adjust to the insurgent response.

- Growing operational understanding that the goals for Afghan development have been fundamentally unrealistic in timing and scope, and acceptance of a much more limited and practical endstate based on Afghan priorities and perceptions and key needs for security and stability. However, this understanding is still far from a realistic management of goals and expectations, but is moving towards acceptance of the fact that we must plan for "Afghan good enough" and not "Afghan unachievable."

- Fundamental reorganization of the intelligence efforts to provide far more honest reporting, better metrics and judgments, and the kind of "net assessment" and civil-military approach necessary to understand what is happening and to support a meaningful campaign. This is supported by considerably more realistic strategic assessments that still have a long way to go to getting it right -- perhaps a year more -- but still prove to be major progress.

- Build up of a US force large enough to deal with the most critical threats, and a de facto recognition that -- as was the case in Iraq -- the US must lead to win, rather than hope for allied efforts that will not come.

- Deployment of US forces on the basis of overall strategic priorities, rather than by zone of operations. In addition, a real partnership with the British, and an understanding that we must play a role in the center and north, rather than rely on our allies, or see continued insurgent gains.

- Progress in providing civilian assets in the field. While still badly short of what is needed, it represents the core of the effort required.

- Shifts in aid and civil/governance efforts that give priority to key security and stability needs, and lay the groundwork for building up more effective governance and economic progress at the key district and population center level.

- Sufficient progress in the counter-IED effort to prevent it from being the Taliban's equivalent of the Stinger.

- Growing understanding that the primary problem the US faces in strategic communications is to build transparency, credibility, and trust in the US public, Congress, allies, and media and to do so in ways that have lasting credibility and impact, rather than spinning the war in ways that build ignorance and mistrust.
Progress in Many Key Areas - II

• Growing understanding that the US, ISAF, and aid funds and contracts are the main source of today's unacceptable level of Afghan corruption and wealthy power brokers, but the steadily improving efforts to control the flow of aid and contract money. Specifically, limiting it to the Afghans who use it properly and focusing on the effectiveness of our efforts rather than the size and rate of spending. While it is probably a year away from broad effectiveness and two years away from the level of control that is really needed, it still proves to be some significant progress.

• First real effort to adequately resource and organize the ANSF development effort. While there are still serious problems, they seem to be solvable over time and this effort is already making real progress at the ANA level.

• Acceptance of the need to create Afghan forces and structure of local governance that

• Growing understanding that the US country effort must be a truly integrated civil-military effort, or we will lose the war. There is at least some progress in reorganizing the US country team both in Kabul and the field. Though this is still about a year or so from the effort we need, it shows real progress.

• Some matching progress on the part of our allies, and in restructuring the ISAF/PRT effort in the field.

• Serious efforts in the field to go from a conceptual approach to shape-clear-hold-build to actual operations in Helmand, and the beginning of operations in Kandahar. A new degree of coherence in similar efforts in RC East. This is all still experimental and uncertain -- particularly in the ability to sustain progress over time -- but is also inevitable given the limited level of effort when the new strategy was put in place.

• Real, if still imperfect, progress in making Pakistan a meaningful partner in the war.

• Deployment of enough UCAV, Special Forces, and other intelligence assets to pose a continuing threat to insurgent networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan. More effective use of "counterterrorism" tools as well as counterinsurgency tools.

• Changes in counternarcotics tactics: moving away from the focus of broad eradication that effectively drove narcotics into the control of the Taliban to a focus on higher level traffickers and networks and key areas of insurgent control.

• Serious effort to find a working balance between the real world limits imposed by the Karzai and Pakistani governments, and finding the practical work arounds to these limits. Though an extremely uncertain process, and some impossible efforts to transform the Afghan and Pakistani power structure exist, it is still better and less pointless confrontation.
But, “Winning” Must Still Address Seven Centers of Gravity

• Defeating the insurgency not only in tactical terms, but by eliminating its control and influence over the population.

• Creating an effective and well-resourced NATO/ISAF and US response to defeating the insurgency and securing the population.

• Building up a much larger and more effective (and enduring base for transition) mix of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

• Giving the Afghan government the necessary capacity and legitimacy (and lasting stability) at the national, regional/provincial, district, and local levels.

• Creating an effective, integrated, and truly operational civil and civil-military effort. NATO/ISAF, UN, member country, and NGO and international community efforts.

• Dealing with Pakistan both in the NWFP and as a potential failed state. Finding stable relations in India, Iran, “Stans,” Russia, and China

• Making effective trade-offs with other US domestic and security interests