

What Will Be the Legacy of the War in Afghanistan?

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the possible outcome of the war in Afghanistan once NATO and U.S. troops depart this country in Central Asia. Did this war become a matter of convenience after 9/11 to find a common enemy? What was the West's rationale for entering this war, in terms of the "clear and present danger" to the U.S. and her NATO allies?

A. Background

When the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, the country reverted to a civil war between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban. After 9/11, the U.S. led coalition enabled the Alliance to defeat the Taliban and their al-Qaeda allies. By December 2001 the city of Kandahar was abandoned by the Taliban and under the Bonn Agreement, Hamid Karzai became President of the Afghan Transitional Government. By January 2002, NATO forces in Operation Anaconda forced the retreat of al-Qaeda from Afghanistan to Pakistan.

On November 19, 2010 at a NATO summit meeting in Lisbon, heads of state of 49 countries agreed to a withdrawal of 150,000 U.S. and NATO troops by 2014 and a

transfer of responsibility to Afghan security forces.¹ By that time, the U.S. will have been engaged in a 13-year war. Since 2009, the U.S. has spent over \$100 billion a year on the troop surge in Afghanistan. Between 2001 and 2010, the U.S. spent \$444 billion in Afghanistan, including \$25 billion each for economic development and Afghan security.

At the outset of the Afghanistan campaign, NATO set a number of strategic aims—rebuilding the Afghan state, defeating the Taliban and stabilizing the region.² Can any of these aims be achieved by 2014? What will the “end state” look like when most of the NATO troops have left?

B. Who is the Enemy?

As a result of discussions within the Obama Cabinet politicians and the U.S. military as to the numbers required for the U.S. troop “surge” in Afghanistan in 2009, a number of questions were raised concerning who the enemy in Afghanistan actually was.³ In establishing an effective counterinsurgency program in the country, was the intention of defeating al-Qaeda to also include the Afghan Taliban?⁴ Was it to disrupt, dismantle or defeat the Taliban, even though al-Qaeda was now operating out of Pakistan?

While it is true that the Taliban do not pose a threat to U.S. homeland interests, if it confronted the Karzai regime, could it be argued by the U.S. government that the Taliban threatened their regional interests? If so, as the U.S. role in nation-building grew, they could say the Taliban posed a threat to their troops stationed in the country, on the assumption that the presence of NATO/U.S. troops should be there in the first place.

Although there are certainly ideological differences between the Taliban and al-Qaeda, it is likely that there was evidence of cooperation at the operational level

¹ A. Rashid, *Pakistan on the Brink – The Future of America, Pakistan and Afghanistan*, (Viking Press, 2012), p. 15.

² Ibid, footnote 17, p. 19.

³ B. Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2010).

⁴ Ibid., p. 145.

between the two groups, such as the use of common facilitation networks, weapons for cash arrangements, intelligence sharing, etc.

After a briefing of the military in Afghanistan, Senator Lindsey Graham wrote a memo stating, “America is worried about al-Qaeda attacking, but our briefings were all about the insurgent Taliban.⁵ Americans understand that Taliban are bad guys, but what drives the American psyche more than anything is, are we about to let the country that attacked us once attack us twice?”

Vice President J. Biden, at one of the intelligence briefings, disputed the claim that al-Qaeda and the Taliban were so intertwined and so intermingled that the success of one meant the success of the other.⁶ “No, he remarked, they’re actually very distinct. We’re assuming that if al-Qaeda comes back into Afghanistan, where it wasn’t, it would be welcomed by the Taliban ... We have no basis for concluding that.” Al-Qaeda was much safer in Pakistan, why would they want to go back to Afghanistan? A former CIA operative noted in discussions that there were very few al-Qaeda remaining in Afghanistan and if the Taliban re-established control in Kabul, it was very unlikely they would host al-Qaeda back after what it cost them in 2001. However, it is certainly not clear whether al-Qaeda would move back into Afghanistan or not, once the majority of U.S./NATO troops depart the country.

The significant question that should be addressed is why NATO and the U.S. were pursuing and attacking the Taliban after 2001. The grounds by the U.S. after 9/11 for launching attacks against Afghanistan appeared to be that this country failed to give up Osama Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda terrorists. But after December 2001, most al-Qaeda members had crossed the border into Pakistan. Why then, after these events, did NATO concentrate its manpower and resources against the Taliban in Afghanistan when its goal was to “disrupt, dismantle and defeat” al-Qaeda and its extremist allies? Their support structure and safe houses are in Pakistan; not Afghanistan.⁷

Ahmed Rashid, a noted Pakistani journalist based in Lahore, in his recent book on Afghanistan, noted:

⁵ Ibid., p. 155.

⁶ Ibid., p. 166.

⁷ Ibid., p. 99.

Even though the Taliban had received extensive training, funding and other support from al-Qaeda, both before and after 2001, they have now distanced themselves from it. Unlike other groups, the Afghan Taliban leadership had never sworn an oath of loyalty to al-Qaeda or to Osama Bin Laden; nor had they adopted al-Qaeda's global jihad agenda or helped train foreigners to become suicide bombers as others have done.⁸ ... The Taliban stressed that they considered themselves Afghan nationalists and not global jihadists. Since 2001, the Afghan insurgents have sought to portray themselves as defenders of culture as well as religion and nationality.⁹

It is the position of the insurgents that they are fighting an unjust, corrupt government supported by anti-Islamic foreigners.¹⁰

The Taliban see themselves as a mixture of Pashtun tribal conservatism and Wahabi fanaticism associated with support from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.¹¹ They stress the power of the mullahs rather than the Pushtan balance of tribal, secular and religious authority.

The question remains unanswered: why is NATO fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan while the global terrorists—al-Qaeda—are, for the most part, located in various locations throughout Pakistan? Although most Western countries do not necessarily agree with their strict Islamic philosophy and actions, the Taliban are only concerned with restoring themselves in the seat of government. Unlike al-Qaeda, they are not involved with global Jihad terrorism. The Taliban were not involved with 9/11 operations. Similar to the Soviet forces, the Taliban regard NATO troops as infidels supporting a corrupt and illegal government in Kabul. They are willing to wait until NATO and the U.S. depart their country to restore control or engage in a civil war again with their northern opponents.

⁸ Ibid., footnote 17, p. 117.

⁹ D. Isby, *Afghanistan – Graveyard of Empires*, (New York: Pegasus Books, 2010), p. 57.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 70.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 82.

C. What Will the Legacy of NATO Involvement Be in Afghanistan?

Historically, foreigners who have involved Afghanistan have not fared well.¹² Alexander the Great, Tamerlane, the British and the Soviet Union were unable to conquer this country in Central Asia.

As NATO and the U.S. withdraw from Afghanistan, what is the endgame? What has NATO accomplished for the last 13 years in assisting the country to transform itself at every level – from the political, economic, military and human rights sectors? Were the goals and strategic goals of the NATO coalition achieved at the time of the impending withdrawal of its troops?

This paper is intended to review a number of areas to address these questions.

Government

The power struggle between the center and the remote regions in Afghanistan was reignited in Kabul in 2001, in the wake of the defeat of the Taliban.¹³ The West supported a centralized state instead of a federal system because it was felt that the latter would lead to “state fragmentation and invite destructive foreign support for regional figures.”

The result has been a highly centralized state under a president with extensive powers. Provincial governors became second-level functionaries, subordinate to the Minister of the Interior.¹⁴

The president picks the governors in each province, who in many cases lack credibility in the regions. Many southern Afghans, who were Pashtuns, had traditionally looked to Kandahar, not Kabul, for leadership amongst their tribal chiefs. International organizations often concentrated their effort in Kabul, rather than the other remaining provinces.

¹² K.E. Meyer and S.B. Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, (Washington, DC: Counterpoint Press, 1999).

¹³ *Ibid.*, footnote 25, p. 210.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

Since President Karzai is Pashtun, many other ethnic groups in Afghanistan in the north, center and west of the country do not trust the central government in Kabul. They consider that their provincial and regional leaders have been marginalized and perceive that much of the tax reserve collected by the prosperous north has been spent in the southern Pashtun areas.¹⁵ Even within Pashtun areas, the rivalry is often severe between the various rules and clans.

Historically, Afghanistan is a collection of sects and extended families, both secular and religious alike. The concept of nationalism takes a back seat to tribal loyalty and affiliation.

In an article in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper, an interview took place with a Mr. Yerin who manages the Soviet Afghanistan War Museum near Moscow.¹⁶ He served in the Soviet Army in the mid-1980s. In response to the questions from the interviewers, he commented:

“With reference to the invasion by both the Soviets and NATO, you’re making all the same mistakes. They know how to fight invaders and they always will ...

We both tried to put boots on their feet - different guns, different uniforms, but it’s the same war.”

He equates the defence of communism with NATO’s claim to set up a democracy. Both ideologies have been represented by appealing slogans and promises and yet he believes that neither one resonates with the conservative, clan-based culture of Afghanistan.

“They have fought against occupiers for centuries, and they will continue to fight until you leave.”

In a recent article in the *Globe and Mail*, Jeffrey Simpson referred to a report from the prestigious International Crisis Group (ICG), headed by Louise Arbour, a former Canadian Supreme Court judge.¹⁷ The report stated that the country is not ready for a fair election in 2014 and that “if systems are not put in place to ensure fairness, the

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 212. Afghans have 12 million Pashtuns living in the country.

¹⁶ *Globe and Mail*, December 29, 2012, p. F-4.

¹⁷ J. Simpson, *Globe and Mail*, October 13, 2012, p. A-12.

already fragile and corrupt government structure could degenerate into extensive unrest, fragmentation of the security services and perhaps even a much wider civil war.”

Even though NATO and Canada went to Afghanistan to promote democracy, the ICG stated, “it is near certainty that under current conditions the 2014 elections will be plagued by massive fraud, particularly in the south and east, where security continues to deteriorate.”

A recent influential report stated “the nexus between criminal enterprises, insurgent networks and corrupt political elites, is undermining Kabul’s security and that of the central-eastern corridor.”¹⁸ As a result, Rashid maintains that outside Kabul, these networks become Taliban shadow governments and governors which operate in more than half of the 62 districts in the seven provinces.¹⁹

More than two years after the collapse of Afghanistan’s biggest private bank, a public inquiry reported on what went wrong.²⁰ The rescue of Kabul Bank required a bail-out worth 5-6 percent GDP, making it one of the world’s largest banking failures relative to a country’s economy.

As noted in the *Economist* article, the players involved included a small clique of executives and shareholders who ran the bank for their own enrichment. They gave themselves huge loans under fictitious names and false paperwork. When the bank failed, \$861 million was extended to just 12 individuals and their companies.

One of the serious areas not achieved by the Karzai government is a lack of security in areas outside Kabul. As noted by Isby, “development by itself cannot avail in Afghanistan without legitimacy; and legitimacy in the eyes of Afghans, requires security from outside attack, which the government in Kabul is not doing, especially in much of the south and east.”²¹

¹⁸ *The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland*, International Crisis Group, June 27, 2011.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, footnote 17, p. 108.

²⁰ *The Economist*, December 1, 2012, p. 47 – Report of the Public Inquiry – November 28, 2012.

²¹ *Ibid.*, footnote 25, p. 160.

As the ICG report noted,

Security deteriorated after mid-2011 when more responsibility was transferred from NATO to local forces. Targeted killings of civilians and government officials have been rising since 2009 as the Taliban and its allies have shifted tactics. It has been increasingly clear that ISAF is unable to dislodge the Taliban from its strongholds in the south and east.²²

Isby also remarked that by

... 2008-2010 the government was also seeing its legitimacy hurt by failing to get outside Kabul and interact with the population and to be seen in the act of exercising authority versus nominally delegating it to corrupt officials or ineffective ministries that have no presence outside Kabul and provincial capitals.²³

There appears to be a disconnect between the state institutions and the citizens.

Rashid is very blunt concerning how he perceives the current leadership is in Afghanistan. "President Hamid Karzai has lost the trust of many Afghans and the international community, as he has failed to improve governance, tackle corruption, or to carry out free and fair elections."²⁴

Afghan Security Forces (ASF)

For the U.S., the key to a successful withdrawal from Afghanistan was the buildup of the Afghan Security Forces (ASF), which includes the army and the police. By 2012, the U.S. has spent a total of \$39 billion towards the ASF.²⁵

There are questions, however, about the ability of the ASF to secure the country. The army has grown to 184,000 soldiers and the police force numbers 146,000.²⁶ Critics argue that the rapid expansion has not significantly improved their ability to plan and

²² Ibid., footnote 33.

²³ See footnote 25, p. 242.

²⁴ See footnote 17, p. 20.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 109.

²⁶ *Calgary Herald*, October 19, 2012, A-18.

conduct operations without the support of NATO, in terms of logistics, support and medical evacuations.

The number of Afghans leaving the army is high, with 27% of troops either deserting or not re-enlisting. As a result, the Army needs to train about 50,000 recruits each year to compensate for the losses. It has been determined that 86% of the soldiers were illiterate and the use of drugs was a significant problem.²⁷

The problem appears to be a lack of senior leadership and the absence of a properly trained officer corps.

A recent upsurge in the number of insider attacks on NATO troops by Afghan soldiers and police has further undermined support for the war in the west. In 2007, there were two “insider” attacks on NATO troops resulting in two deaths. In 2012, there were 58 such fatalities for coalition troops including 35 Americans.²⁸

In September 2012 NATO ordered a “temporary” scaling back of joint operations with the ASF to reduce the risk of further “green or blue” shootings.²⁹

According to at least one critic of the Karzai regime, the estimate is that the state will require over \$8 billion in aid each year just to maintain its ASF and bureaucracy.³⁰ This figure is probably conservative on the basis that large areas of the country are still under the control of the Taliban.

It was recently reported by the *New York Times* newspaper (January 10, 2013) that the Afghan Amnesty Program has failed. Two years in an attempt to lure Taliban fighters off the battlefield, western officials now acknowledge the results have been disappointing. With promises of jobs and land, many Taliban renounced violence and turned in their weapons. Without these promises being fulfilled, the same persons are often rejoining their former outfits and taking up arms again.

²⁷ See footnote 17, p. 109.

²⁸ Los Angeles Times, December 23, 2012, p. A-35 “Waiting for the Last Plane Out”.

²⁹ “The Economist”, September 22, 2012, p. 50.

³⁰ Ibid, footnote 15, p. 19.

Considerable investment must be made to provide for an adequate network for coordination and control of remote ANA and other ANSF forces from central command and staff units in Kabul. In the absence of a secure and reliable infrastructure, remote front line units will be more prone to be influenced by, and perhaps desert to local tribal or warlord leaders.

America and other donor countries have agreed to provide \$3.6 billion a year for the ANSF, with the Afghan government chipping in \$500 million for a further ten years. Canada agreed to pledge \$110 million a year to help Afghanistan pay for its own army and police between 2015 and 2018. The only Canadian troops still remaining in Afghanistan are 950 trainers to assist in the building up of Afghan forces.

The Economy

It can be argued that the bare bones of a functioning government are currently missing in Afghanistan. The U.S. and NATO have failed to create an indigenous Afghan economy that is not dependent on foreign aid or employment with the military.³¹ The creation of long-term jobs has been extremely limited.

Rashid noted in his book that a great deal of U.S. resources had been squandered in contracts for the military and civilian infrastructure.³² The Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan, established by Congress in 2008, reported the waste and fraud had affected \$30 billion worth of contracts in the two countries. The U.S. has deployed more than 260,000 contractors to both Iraq and Afghanistan.

The bureaucracy in Afghanistan has not fared particularly well. There is now a civil service academy, but it will be years before a difference is made.³³ The justice system was also depleted, so the Taliban were able to exercise their own form of justice in the countryside. One hundred and seventeen districts did not have a judge. Most ministries lacked capacity, trained officials or the ability to handle money. In 2011, 300

³¹ Ibid., p. 20.

³² Ibid., p. 96.

³³ Ibid., p. 111.

foreign advisors were still working at the Interior Ministry, costing the U.S. government \$36 million a year.³⁴

One of the major problems for a new government is the lack of education in the country. Only about 10 percent of the populace is literate. There are many examples of senior officers in the Afghan Army and Police who can neither read nor write.

Infrastructure has improved to some degree in the country. By 2009, Kabul reported 600,000 connections to Afghanistan's electrical power grid; a 178 percent increase from 2003.³⁵ However, by 2011 only 6% of Afghans received electricity.³⁶

One of the difficulties for the Karzai regime is the direct infusion of development funding into the provincial areas by western governments and NGO's which by-passes central authority in Kabul. This approach undermines the traditional role of central government where provincial leaders towed the line with the centre on the basis the centre was responsible for distributing international funding "largesse" to the provinces. With this approach to developmental aid projects, the central authority has become irrelevant.

As a result of the international donor's conference in Tokyo last July, \$16 billion was pledged in developmental aid to Afghanistan over the next four years in exchange for the Kabul government's commitment to fight corruption and improve governance in the capital.

The significant question is whether such funds are sufficient to provide for sustained funding for the necessary security requirements , to replace or provide necessary security requirements, to replace or provide necessary infrastructure to promote economic growth, and to provide basic social services, particularly in the remote areas of the country.

³⁴ Interview by Rashid with government minister in Kabul, November 11, 2010.

³⁵ See footnote 25, p. 241.

³⁶ See footnote 17, p. 20.

Pakistan

Afghanistan's neighbour to the east has been influential for decades in influencing interests in that country. Pakistan has always been concerned at the outset with India, and the threat of Indian influence and support in Afghanistan. As a result, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has been supportive of the Taliban in operations in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

As Rashid has noted,

the Pakistan Army remains extremely selective who it goes after. It hunts down only those who oppose the Pakistani state; it allows Afghan Taliban such as Jalaluddin Haqqani who remains loyal to Pakistan to thrive in North Waziristan. Likewise, it leaves alone Pakistan's Taliban commanders such as Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Mauvi Nazir Nazir from South Waziristan to fight U.S. forces in Afghanistan.³⁷

The relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan is both complicated and confusing to outsiders. The U.S. provides approximately \$3 billion in aid money each year. The ISI continues to provide the CIA with intelligence on al-Qaeda who still reside in the Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).³⁸

Although a Pashtun-dominated government in Kabul remains a major policy goal of the Pakistan's government, it would appear that Hamid Karzai has few friends in Islamabad.³⁹

U.S. Secretary of Defence said of Pakistan's intelligence involvement with the insurgents: "Look, they're maintaining contact with these groups, in my view as a strategic hedge ... They are not sure who's going to win in Afghanistan. They're not sure what's going to happen along that border area. So, to a certain extent, they play both sides."⁴⁰

The Afghanistan government is continually concerned with Pakistan's support of the Afghan Taliban and their support bases in that country. For years, al-Qaeda have

³⁷ Ibid., p. 53. NAZIR was reported killed by a U.S. drone strike on January 3, 2013.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 54.

³⁹ See footnote 5, p. 97.

⁴⁰ Interview, 60 Minutes, May 17, 2009 – Secretary of Defence – R. Gates.

operated out of Pakistan in pursuit of its global operations. This was confirmed in the capture of Osama Bin Laden and the continued deployment of U.S. drone activity in that country. Recently the Afghan government has identified the Pakistani's as being an ally of the Taliban and is pushing for its listing as a terrorist entity.

Strategic Objectives

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, there was an unambiguous justification for the initial U.S. intervention into Afghanistan; to destroy al-Qaeda infrastructure and leadership based in that country, in retaliation for the 9/11 attacks and to prevent further attacks on US interests and citizens. There was legitimacy, international support and focused mission objectives in the initial period of intervention (i.e. a more narrowly focussed counter-terrorist strategy). Things began to get complicated with mission creep, when Taliban 'support' for Al-Qaeda was equated with the need to replace the Taliban regime, which led to regime change, and ultimately the need to support the Karzai government and further nation-building efforts, which clearly went beyond the initial counter-terrorism (CT) mission and strategic aims. Furthermore, just as the demands on coalition / NATO forces were expanding country-wide (i.e. beyond the immediate mandate to protect Kabul), U.S. resources were being diverted to Iraq. In hindsight, this enabled Taliban forces to become a full fledged threat again circa 2005-06 and, when linked to the broadening strategic nation building objectives of NATO/ ISAF and coalition forces, led to the need for a counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy versus a more narrowly focussed CT strategy. The implementation of COIN strategy requires a number of very important balance of interests, takes a much longer time to see through to the end, and most COIN issues ultimately cannot be resolved through military means alone (whereas CT strategies can). A lengthy COIN campaign requires long-term political/ policy/ public support, and this is not what people had originally signed on for. Furthermore, a reliance on high-tech ordinance to off-set casualties has not proven effective against hit and run-type operations which are designed to demonstrate the fallibility and inability of the Karzai government to provide basic security as opposed to destroying ISAF forces.

Conclusions

Now after twelve years, with troop draw-downs underway, we are now in a position to ask: what will be the legacy of the NATO/U.S. intervention? I believe at the present time there is no clear cut outcome in terms of the overall stability of the country. There are many unknowns such as the outcome of the next presidential election, the quality of the ANS forces, the ability of the central government to provide basic services to outlying areas, how to deal with corruption issues, and the intentions and loyalties of regional warlords. Needless to say, many of these matters cannot be addressed solely by military solutions, regardless of how many foreign troops remain. Military forces are but a single element in the boarder COIN strategy.

In terms of the initial counter-terrorism strategy in the country and in Pakistan, it could be argued that the core leadership of al-Qaeda has been imported. Even though al-Qaeda and its affiliates still exist in Yemen, Somalia, West Africa/Nigeria, South-East Asia and more recently in Syria, the organization has been seriously affected. It still remains to be seen if a lack of security exists past 2014 will result in al-Qaeda slipping across the border regions of Pakistan back into Afghanistan.

With the U.S. intending to leave special forces units in Afghanistan to focus on CT operations, we will have seen a full cycle: initially starting with a limited but successful CT strategy (with the exception of the core al-Qaeda leadership escaping via Tora Bora), evolving into a broader, more complex and less successful COIN strategy, and finally returning to a more focused and less resource-intensive CT strategy once again.

Having an essentially uncontrolled border with Pakistan which gives sanctuary for both the Taliban and al-Qaeda and announcing the specific withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces in 2014, violates two cardinal rules of COIN strategy. The latter in particular undermines any ongoing efforts to win the will of the people, who now must make in many cases literally life and death decisions on which horse to back in how their world will unfold in the future. By carrying out reported hit and run attacks, the Taliban demonstrate to their people that even having foreign military troops in the country, the Karzai government still cannot protect the people in either the urban or rural setting.

Afghanistan has been at war for approximately 365 years. There has been a brief interlude of peace between the winter of 2001-02 when the Taliban were defeated and the spring of 2003 when the Taliban commenced the insurgency.⁴¹ During the Soviet invasion of the country, Jonathan Steele noted:

The United States played a key role in exploiting the Kremlin's blunders by arming rebels during the Soviet period (1979-89), many of whom—including Osama Bin Laden—wanted to impose a fundamentalist version of Sharia law that was not part of Afghan tradition. In 2001 hubris led Washington to think it would be able to do a better job of providing stability and progress than the Soviets had done.⁴²

Afghans want to know whether the withdrawal of NATO troops will finally bring them peace which eluded them after the Soviet Army left. If they truly believed that security, peace and economic development would be achieved as a result of NATO's 13-year intervention, it is likely that this dream will not be fulfilled. This deployment will likely be seen by the local population as another failed foreign military intervention.

Since the invasion in 2001, coalition forces have recorded 3,245 fatalities, according to iCasualties, an independent agency that tracks such accounts.⁴³ The Canadians have lost 158 troops and the U.S. losses surpass 2,000. Approximately 18,000 U.S. service members have been wounded in hostile action.

Francesco Vendrell, a former UN and European Union envoy, summed up the current security situation in Afghanistan: "Having failed dismally to make the Afghan people our allies", he wrote in 2011, "we will inevitably abandon them to a combination of Taliban in the south and the warlords in the north and—having somehow redefined success—we will go home convinced that it is the Afghan people who have failed us."⁴⁴

It is very likely that the NATO military counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan will be deemed to be a failure, similar to the Soviet invasion of the country over 30 years ago. Is there an Afghan solution to the current unstable environment in

⁴¹ See footnote 17, p. 68.

⁴² J. Steele, *Ghosts of Afghanistan – The Haunted Battlefield*, (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2011), p. 394.

⁴³ See footnote 32.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

the country? Security more than any single issue determines legitimacy and the insurgents claim they can provide it whereas the government in Kabul cannot.⁴⁵

Rising crime rates in the cities and rising food and energy prices in 2008 also strained the legitimacy of the government as they were unable to do anything about these matters.

By 2008-10 the government was also seen as not getting outside Kabul and interacting with the people in the regions.⁴⁶ As noted by some of the Afghan politicians, there was a total disconnect between state institutions and the citizens of Afghanistan.⁴⁷

The West has attempted to create a “democracy” template in Afghanistan based on our way of implementing same. Isby made the following statement with respect to this important issue:

The problem with democracy, however, is that foreign supporters have packaged it in a way that includes much cultural baggage that Afghans may not accept or will find alien. Rapid modernization, without establishing support and getting buy-in, can destroy legitimacy in Afghanistan. The West has not aimed to present democracy in the forms that the Afghans have found appealing.⁴⁸

The unpopularity of the Karzai government, the culture of corruption, a lack of effective government, insecurity, a lack of economic development and improvement, narcotics and the perception of ongoing fraud in the country has challenged democracy’s appeal to most Afghans.⁴⁹ Karzai’s dependence on foreign aid and military support also hurts the legitimacy of the government where the country has always been nationalistic and suspicious of outsiders. This allows the Taliban to portray themselves as the defenders of the country’s culture and values.

A conversation between General Colin Powell and President Clinton, with respect to the outcome of the Somalia U.S. Expeditionary Force debacle in 1993, may also be applicable to the proposed departure of the NATO forces in Afghanistan: “The

⁴⁵ Ibid., footnote 23, p. 242.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 242.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 243.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

U.S. could not substitute its brand of democracy for centuries of tribalism. We've got to find a way to get out, and soon."⁵⁰

As noted earlier, from an Afghan perspective, the U.S. and NATO troops might be considered as "invaders", similar to others who historically have attempted the same over the centuries. It is interesting to refer to comments made by Nathanael Greene in 1776 to his wife, Ireene, in assisting General Washington who had joined the Rhode Island Kentish Guards.⁵¹ Asked what they were fighting for, he remarked,

"It was to defend our common rights that we went to war. The British regulars, the hated red-coats, were the "invaders" and must be repelled. We are soldiers who devote ourselves to arms not for the invasion of other countries but for the defence of our own, not for the gratification of our own private interest, but for the public security."

At the present time, it is difficult to predict a positive outcome for "democracy" in Afghanistan, once NATO and U.S. troops depart the country. It is very likely that the Taliban will not be defeated and that a civil war will erupt once again when the foreigners have eventually left. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda is still embedded in Pakistan to carry out their terrorist plans worldwide.

As Igor Yerin in his interview noted: "We were only there for nine years and NATO/US are going on 12. What can we tell you that you haven't already learned?"⁵²

⁵⁰ See footnote 1, p. 23.

⁵¹ David McCullough, *1776*, (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2005), p. 54.

⁵² See footnote 32.