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Will We Know It When We See It? Evaluating the Success of Obama's Policy in Afghanistan

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Will President Barack Obama's plan for Afghanistan succeed? Second only in importance to revitalizing the American economy, the question of how to proceed in Afghanistan after eight years of war was central to the Obama Administration's policy agenda during its first year in office. Indeed, Afghanistan is considered to be President Obama's signal foreign policy crisis and will shape his legacy in this arena.¹ As a candidate, Obama criticized the policy of his predecessor, President George W. Bush, for failing to implement a policy that would provide a long-term solution to Afghanistan as a threat to American and allied security. Obama argued that this flawed policy in Afghanistan flowed primarily from the Bush Administration's decision in 2003 to pivot its attention and resources away from Afghanistan toward a new target: Iraq.² Candidate Obama vowed to conduct a thorough review of the American-led effort in Afghanistan, promising policy revisions that would set a new course for a war that was won in 2002 but teetered on failure by fall 2009.

Gauging the fate of the Obama Administration's policy in Afghanistan is a difficult task. Although the Obama Administration found many faults with the policy of its predecessor, it struggled mightily to find a suitable replacement policy and to develop a methodology for gauging its own progress in the war it inherited.³ That said, assessing the likely success of the Obama Administration's policy in Afghanistan is important in terms of our understanding of American foreign policy in general, as well as for gaining a sense of our capacity as students of international relations to anticipate the impact of foreign policy decisions *a priori*. Key to any assessment of Obama's policy innovation in Afghanistan necessitates defining the standard of *policy success* by which the "facts on the ground" can be judged.

Defining a standard of policy success is fraught with difficulty. Policy goals can be imprecise, even nebulous, as well as nested within broader policy goals or initiatives that are amorphous enough to challenge any decisive causal linkage of outcomes with the

¹ Helene Cooper. "Obama's War: Fearing Another Quagmire in Afghanistan." *New York Times* January 24, 2009.

² Barack Obama. "Renewing American Leadership" *Foreign Affairs* July/August 2007. Also, see David Rohde and David E. Sanger. "How a 'Good War' in Afghanistan Went Bad." *New York Times* August 12, 2007.

³ David E. Sanger, Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker. "White House Struggles to Gauge Success in Afghanistan." *New York Times* August 7, 2009. Also, see Peter Baker and Eric Schmitt. "Several Afghan Strategies, None a Clear Choice." *New York Times* October 1, 2009.

policies themselves.⁴ For example, an overarching goal of American foreign policy is maintaining national security. A barometer of policy success for this goal might comprise *direct* and *indirect* standards, or indicators, of policy success. A direct standard might reflect the degree to which potential attacks on the United States and its allies are deterred, while an indirect standard might require addressing the underlying causes of these potential attacks on American national security (e.g., fortifying failed states.) In this essay we focus our attention on the indirect standard of policy success, and in particular, on the likely course of events in Afghanistan. We do so because each administration argued that defeating or prevailing over Taliban insurgents was pivotal to longterm, American national security.⁵ Presidents Bush and Obama had therefore identified getting Afghanistan “right,” as central to broader national security objectives.⁶

This essay unfolds in four sections. In the following section we trace the evolution of the American and allied policy in Afghanistan, which enables us to place the Obama policy, and our assessments of this policy, in greater conceptual relief. Next, we examine “what might have been” had a different Bush Administration policy been pursued in Afghanistan following the defeat of the Taliban 2001. Thereafter, we examine the likelihood that the Obama Administration's policy choice in the counterinsurgency (COIN) war in Afghanistan will succeed given the historical record of foreign powers in COIN warfare during the twentieth century. In the fourth section, we examine the long-term impact of American policy in Afghanistan for American and allied security by examining the impact of COIN wars on the “failed state” trajectory of states that experiencing these wars.

EVOLVING DEFINITIONS OF POLICY SUCCESS IN AFGHANISTAN

In the interests of defining policy success, it is instructive to compare and contrast what might be termed the *macro-* and *micro-level* policies bearing on Afghanistan formulated by the Bush and Obama Administrations, and the relationship of these policies to American national security. Macro-level policies are those that set the broad parameters of American foreign policy. For example, the Bush Administration's emphasis on democracy promotion, eventually a central component of the evolving Bush Doctrine, served as a central element in the Bush Administration's engagement of the War on

⁴ For example, attacks on the United States, either by foreign state militaries or terrorist organizations, are relatively rare events historically. Periods devoid of such attacks can span decades, presidents and most certainly different anti-terror policies. As such, tracing the causal link between policy choice and outcome is difficult.

⁵ The Obama Administration dropped references to the “War on Terror” as an official term for fighting terrorism.

⁶ The question of whether and how outcomes in Afghanistan influence American security---namely, reducing the threat of future terror attacks---is important to consider, although we do not do so herein. See Eric Schmitt and Scot T. Shane. “Crux of Afghan Debate: Will More Troops Curb Terror?” *New York Times* September 8, 2009.

Terror.⁷ Alternatively, micro-level policies are those initiatives designed to address conditions in individual countries (e.g., Iraq), regions, or specific policy issues (e.g., terrorism, drugs, the environment.) Theoretically, micro- and macro-level policies should be synchronized such that the former generates the latter, and the latter gives purpose to the former.

In terms of Afghanistan, one can argue that the Bush Administration achieved *theoretical synchronicity* between the macro-level policy of spreading democracy to regions traditionally dominated by authoritarian regimes and the micro-level policy of nation-building liberal political and economic systems in defeated authoritarian regimes and pressing the remaining authoritarians to liberalize. However, where the discontinuity arose in Bush policy was in the translation of micro-level policies into the level of operational policy; that is, what soldiers and diplomats were tasked to do “on the ground.” In Afghanistan, this discontinuity manifested itself in the failure of the American-led allied coalition to shift from war-fighting to a nation-building operational policy.

While the overarching goal of the Obama Administration's foreign policy is the protection of American national security, as it was for its predecessor, the macro- and micro-level policies designed by the Obama Administration to achieve this goal depart from the counterpart policies formulated during the Bush Administration. The Obama Administration's foreign policy is decidedly more pragmatic. One might argue that this pragmatism privileges micro-level policies at the expense of their macro-level counterparts. For example, the Bush Administration's macro-level policy of global democratization is replaced with micro-policies that are designed more for managing threats emerging at the local level that might challenge American national security.⁸ For the Obama Administration, global solutions (democracy) for a global threat (terrorism) are replaced by pragmatic, problem-specific solutions (e.g., democracy promotion, engagement, counterinsurgency, remote applications of force) for specific challenges to American and allied national security.

Recall that, at least theoretically, the macro-level policy dominance of the Bush Administration facilitated the identification of rather precise criteria for judging successful policy outcomes in Afghanistan. However, we argue that micro-level dominance of the Obama Administration suggests a more complex, and at times contradictory, application of policymaking to the war in -Afghanistan. The micro-level dominance, and the contradictions contained therein, make assessing policy success

⁷ *National Security Strategy of the United States 2002*. United States National Security Council, 2002. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/national/nss-020920.pdf>.

⁸ Jake Tapper. "President Obama De-Emphasizes Priority of Democracy in Afghanistan." *ABC News* March 28, 2009. <http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalpunch/2009/03/president-ob-21.html>. However, the Administration's emphasis and enthusiasm for a democratic regime in Afghanistan vacillated throughout 2009. For a discussion, see Helene Cooper. "Emphasis on Al Qaeda at Three-Way Talks." *New York Times* May 7, 2009.

more difficult. Indeed, the difficulty of defining policy success led Obama's special adviser on Pakistan and Afghanistan, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, when queried about gauging policy success in Afghanistan, to respond that "we'll know it when we see it."⁹

Obama's endorsement of the nation-building strategy to win the "hearts and minds" of the Afghan people, as proposed by Gen. Stanley McChrystal, contains a potential contradiction between the theoretical micro-level policy and the strategy applied in the field by military and civilian personnel. While McChrystal was replaced by Gen. David Petraeus, Petraeus continues to use McChrystal's strategy. McChrystal's proposed strategy for fighting the insurgency---i.e., "clear, build, hold, and transfer"---is in many ways a better fit for the micro-level designs of the Bush Administration for Afghanistan. McChrystal's strategy is quintessentially one of the nation-building variety, though it might be argued that nation-building can occur absent the democratization component that was key to the Bush policy.¹⁰

The Obama policy in Afghanistan departs from the fully pragmatic approach in several ways. First, the COIN strategy proposed by McChrystal, that of winning the "hearts and minds" of the Afghan population, historically requires significant time to execute, something that fails to square with Obama's stated goal of commencing a reduction of the American military commitment in 2011.¹¹

Second, there is some ambiguity as to what Gen. McChrystal's COIN strategy is ultimately designed to achieve, i.e., its endgame. Initial statements by Gen. McChrystal indicated that the success of his policy would be reflected in the *defeat* of the insurgents by winning Afghan allegiance. More recent reports suggest that McChrystal's strategy may have been designed to achieve a *negotiated settlement* between the allied-supported Afghan government, the Taliban insurgents, and perhaps other interested parties.¹² Although the

⁹ Spencer Ackerman. "Holbrooke on Success in Afghanistan: 'We'll Know It When We See It.'" *The Washington Independent* August 12, 2009. <http://washingtonindependent.com/54803/holbrooke-on-success-in-afghanistan-well-know-it-when-we-see-it>.

¹⁰ Gen. Stanley McChrystal. "COMSAF's Initial Assesment (Redacted)." August 30, 2009. Text available at "COMISAF Initial Assessment (Unclassified)---Searchable Document." *The Washington Post* September 21, 2009. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/21/AR2009092100110.html>.

¹¹ Barack Obama. "Obama's Address on the War in Afghanistan." *New York Times* December 2, 2009. The rapid departure from Afghanistan does not square with military assessments of the likely length and cost of the war. For example, see Mark Landler. "Petraeus Warns of a Long and Expensive Mission in Afghanistan." *New York Times* December 10, 2009, and Eric Schmitt. "U.S. Envoy's Cables Show Concerns on Afghan War Plans." *New York Times* January 26, 2010. However, a backlash in Afghanistan following the President's speech prompted the Administration to state that the United States had a long-term commitment to Afghanistan. On this issue, see Mark Mazzetti. "No Firm Plans for a U.S. Exit in Afghanistan." *New York Times* December 7, 2009.

¹² See Helene Cooper and Sheryl Gay Stolberg. "Obama Ponders Outreach to Elements of Taliban." *New York Times* March 8, 2009. An informative discussion of negotiations takes place in "Six Experts on Negotiating with the Taliban." *Council on Foreign Relations* March 20, 2009.

goal of a military defeat of the Taliban insurgents departed from the management emphasis inherent in a pragmatic approach to foreign policy, a negotiated settlement does jibe with this emphasis.¹³

Ultimately, estimating the success of the Obama Administration's micro-level policy in Afghanistan requires an assessment along two temporal dimensions of the conflict, the short- and long-term. The short-term dimension involves determining whether the type of outcome, either military or diplomatic, is likely to be achieved in Afghanistan, while the the long-term dimension involves assessing the implications of the war in Afghanistan for American national security.

NATION-BUILDING IN AFGHANISTAN: DOOMED TO FAILURE?

As noted, we argue that the strategy proposed by Gen. McChrystal is essentially one of nation-building and is what the Bush Administration policy should have looked like had micro-level policy been implemented properly following the toppling of the Taliban regime in 2002. Thus, the Obama Administration's new strategy faces many of the same hurdles that the Bush Administration would have faced, and our overall assessment of the likely success of the Obama policy benefits from an analysis of the prospects for nation-building in Afghanistan in general.

Following the invasion of Afghanistan in 2002, American policymakers turned toward the establishment of a new government that would be friendly to the United States and push Afghanistan down the road toward democracy. Key to the development of an effective, democratic regime was first the establishment of stability in Afghanistan. From its very outset, this effort faced significant challenges that arose from the choices made by American policymakers, as well as long-standing political, economic, and demographic contexts in Afghanistan.

With respect to policy choices, decisions made by the United States and its allies following the ouster of the Taliban regime in 2002 compounded the task of stabilizing the Afghan polity. Because a counterinsurgency strategy requires a capacity to maintain order and security over a wide territory, a troop density of one soldier per 50 populace (.02) is typically seen as the minimum for effective counterinsurgency.¹³ In 2003, there were only slightly more than 10,000 American troops in Afghanistan.¹⁴ By 2007, the number of troops more than doubled to 23,700.¹⁵ Coupled with allied contributions through the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), total allied troop strength in

http://www.cfr.org/publication/18893/six_experts_on_negotiating_with_the_taliban.html. More recently, see Jane Perlez. "Pakistan Is Said to Pursue Role in U.S.-Afghan Talks." *New York Times* February 10, 2010.

¹³ United States. Dept. of the Army et al., *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Amy Belasco, "Troop Levels in the Afghan and Iraq Wars, FY2001-FY2012: Cost and Other Potential Issues." *Congressional Research Service*. July 2, 2009. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R40682.pdf>.

¹⁵ Belasco, "Troop Levels in the Afghan and Iraq Wars..."

Afghanistan in 2007 was approximately 41,700 troops.¹⁶ Given Afghanistan's population of 28 million, this troop level corresponds to a troop density of .0015. Including the 47,000 active members of the Afghan National Army,¹⁷ total troop density in Afghanistan by 2007 was .0030, well short of the recommended minimum for implementing an effective COIN strategy. In order to meet the .02 troop density threshold, a total deployment of 560,000 troops to Afghanistan would have been necessary, a commitment that was simply unfeasible, given resources available to the United States and its allies.

The decision to impose a democratic government in Afghanistan rather than an alternative regime type also brought with it significant challenges to Afghan stability. Established democracies, by encouraging political participation, giving citizens a direct stake in their government, and providing institutions to manage social conflict, play an important role in ensuring the political stability of a state. On the other hand, due to the weakness of their nascent political institutions, newly imposed democracies face a much more difficult time in managing social conflict. This effect is especially pronounced in democracies imposed in states with a large number of social cleavages, making them more likely to experience political violence.¹⁸ The combination of the inter-group competition encouraged by democracy, the fragility of new democratic institutions, and the convenient reliance on social cleavages for political mobilization, combine to dramatically raise the risk of political instability in imposed polities, and did so in post-invasion Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's social, political, and geographic conditions created profound barriers for the establishment of security and the creation of a functioning democratic regime. Significant social cleavages not only encourage political violence in imposed democracies, they also reduce the durability of imposed democracy itself.¹⁹ Policymakers often pointed to the successful examples of imposed democracy in post-World War II Japan and West Germany. These comparisons overlooked the stark differences between those countries and Afghanistan. For example, while Afghanistan has a high degree of social heterogeneity, postwar Japan and West Germany reflected few social divisions, thereby minimizing pressure from competing ethnic and religious groups as Japanese and Germans sought to engage democratic institutions.

¹⁶ ISAF Placemat, December 2007.

http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat_archive/isaf_placemat_071205.pdf.

¹⁷ Official website of the Afghan National Army. <http://www.mod.gov.af/>

¹⁸ Andrew J. Enterline and J. Michael Greig. "Perfect Storms?: Political Instability in Imposed Polities and the Futures of Iraq and Afghanistan," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Volume 52, Issue 6 (2008): 880-915; and Andrew J. Enterline and J. Michael Greig. "Against All Odds? The History of Imposed Democracy and the Future of Iraq and Afghanistan" *Foreign Policy Analysis* Volume 4, Issue 4 (2008): 321-347.

¹⁹ Andrew J. Enterline and J. Michael Greig, "From Here to Eternity?: The Durability of Imposed Democracy and the Futures of Iraq and Afghanistan," Unpublished manuscript, Dept. of Political Science, University of North Texas, October 2010.

Furthermore, postwar violence in Afghanistan was exacerbated by the country's low level of economic development, which is important for the stability and development of democratic institutions.²⁰ Historically, economic development significantly reduces the likelihood of political violence and improves the durability of democratic institutions imposed from abroad.²¹ Although recovering from the destruction of the war, both post-World War II Japan and West Germany were highly developed states and, as such, experienced low levels of instability and developed into full democracies. The economic environment in contemporary Afghanistan, by contrast, is significantly bleaker. Today, Afghanistan ranks 163rd in the world in gross domestic product.²² This extreme poverty serves to increase the risk of political violence and undermine the prospects for the long-term establishment of democratic institutions.

We find that although the choices made by policymakers no doubt influence outcomes in Afghanistan, the American and allied experience in postwar Afghanistan thus far demonstrates that this influence is strongly conditioned by that country's internal characteristics and historical trajectory. Based on this analysis, a pessimist would conclude that policy miscues by the Bush Administration aside, the prevailing environment in Afghanistan would be difficult to master such that the country would be transformed into a stable democracy. The importance of environmental conditions notwithstanding, an essential element of any policy success in Afghanistan involves addressing the renewed Taliban insurgency, which we examine next.

WINNING THE "NEW TYPE OF WAR" IN AFGHANISTAN?

The immediate purpose of the Obama Administration's lengthy review of the coalition forces policy in Afghanistan was to halt the gains of the Taliban insurgents before stabilizing the country and providing the Afghan government an opportunity to secure the allegiance of skeptical rural citizens. Increasingly, the insurgents demonstrated a capacity to carry out attacks and offensive operations with rapidly increasing geographic scope, in addition to innovating their tactics by employing more sophisticated weapons, such as improvised explosive device (IEDs).²³ This evolution of the insurgency left the American-led allied effort in Afghanistan in a precarious situation by spring 2009.

²⁰ Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi. "Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World," *Cambridge Studies in the Theory of Democracy*. (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000); James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war," *American Political Science Review* Volume 97, Issue 1 (2003): 75-90.

²¹ Enterline and Greig, "Against All Odds?"; Enterline and Greig, "Perfect Storms?."

²² International Monetary Fund. *World Economic Outlook Database-October 2009*. Accessed February 10, 2010. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2009/02/weodata/index.aspx>.

²³ In January 2010, 727 roadside bombs were discovered by coalition troops compared with 276 in January 2009. See Tom Vanden Brook. "Roadside Bombs Taking Bigger Toll in Afghanistan." *USA Today* February 19, 2010. http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2010-02-14-ieds-afghanistan_N.htm.

A primary reason for the revitalized insurgency in Afghanistan is due in part to the enemy-centric strategy employed primarily by U.S. military forces during the 2002--2008 period. This strategy sought a military victory on the battlefield, somewhat reminiscent of "search and destroy" tactics employed by the United States during the first phase of the Vietnam War.²⁴ The problem is that decisive military victory generally remains elusive in insurgency warfare, as insurgent forces rarely fight in conventional battles that present the possibility of decisive defeat. David Kilcullen argues that the U.S.-formulated strategy was actually counterproductive because its over reliance on the application of military force led to increased collateral damage in the form of civilian deaths, thereby increasing public insecurity as well as undermining trust between the COIN military and Afghan civilians.²⁵

Gen. McChrystal implemented a shift in operational culture from defeating enemy insurgents to securing the population. By shifting from an enemy-centric to a population-centric strategy, Gen. McChrystal attempted to defeat the insurgents by winning the "hearts and minds" of the Afghan population by focusing on executing a strategy of "clear, build, hold, and transfer" in Taliban dominated regions of the country. Rather than a conflict centering on military power, McChrystal's approach to the conflict suggests that central to his COIN strategy is one heavily grounded in marketing better political, social, and economic alternatives to the Afghan population, or what McChrystal referred to as a "retail war" in winning the allegiance of the Afghan populace.²⁶

To gain some leverage on the question of whether and how Gen. McChrystal's strategy will influence the course of war in Afghanistan, we employ a data sample containing 67 cases in which a foreign power sought to defend central authority in another state or colonial territory from insurgents during the twentieth century.²⁷ Our data sample contains information on the type and timing of COIN strategy changes by foreign powers in addition to the type of outcome in terms of victory or defeat for the foreign power. This data sample is reported in Table 1.

In general, our analysis indicates that a population-centric COIN, such as McChrystal's "hearts and minds" approach, increases the odds of successful policy outcomes from the perspective of foreign powers. This general finding is a byproduct of what John Nagl identifies as the capacity of counterinsurgent armies to learn and adapt and the success

²⁴ David Rohde and David E. Sanger. "How a 'Good War' in Afghanistan Went Bad." *New York Times* August 12, 2007.

²⁵ David Kilcullen. "Troops Must Gain Afghans' Trust, One Expert Says." *National Public Radio* (NPR). February 23, 2009. <http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=100942657>.

²⁶ Eric Schmitt. "Warning From General on End to Afghan Combat." *New York Times* July 16, 2009.

²⁷ Our research design is detailed at greater length in Andrew J. Enterline and Joseph C. Magagnoli. "Reversal of Fortune? Strategy Change & Counterinsurgency Success by Foreign Powers in the Twentieth Century". Unpublished manuscript. Dept. of Political Science, University of North Texas, January 2010. <http://www.psci.unt.edu/enterline/em-freshlook-v58-identified.pdf>.

that accrues to COIN armies that adjust dynamically.²⁸ Yet, while strategic innovation is historically important, the current shift towards a population-centric COIN in Afghanistan is occurring after eight years of warfare. Considering the timing of strategy changes, we find that successful COINs generally reflect the willingness and capacity of the counterinsurgent armies to adapt to strategic deficiencies and insurgent strategic innovations early in a conflict.

By way of illustration, consider the Mau--Mau rebellion in Kenya (1952--1960) during which the initial British COIN relied primarily on violence and repression against the population to neutralize the insurgency. In June 1953, General George Erskine took command of the British forces in Kenya, and rapidly implemented a new strategy that included securing tribal lands and increasing population security. In this case, COIN adaptation occurred approximately one year after the start of the insurgency.²⁹ Conversely, the strategy change in 1976 by South Africa during the Namibian War of Independence (1966—1990) occurred a decade after the start of the conflict and failed to defeat the insurgents. Overall, these historical patterns do not bode well for the recent strategy change in Afghanistan.

While Gen. McChrystal's early statements identified the goal of his revised COIN strategy as one concerned with defeating the Taliban insurgents, recent reports of the allied COIN in Afghanistan suggest a subtle shift in goals such that implementation of the new strategy, such as the test case operation in Marjah, is designed to lay the groundwork for a negotiated political settlement to end the conflict with the Taliban.³⁰ To assess the prospects for, as well as implications of negotiations in Afghanistan as part of the allied COIN war, we updated the aforementioned data sample of 67 foreign power COIN wars occurring during the twentieth century to include information on the occurrence of negotiations between counterinsurgent and insurgent armies.³¹ Our coding of this reveals that 52% (35/67) of the cases reflect some manifestation of negotiation (i.e., including attempts and engagement) between the foreign power prosecuting COIN operations and insurgents. This information is reported in Table 1.

Our analysis of the 35 cases of negotiation during COIN wars suggests several interesting patterns that bear on the question of the policy outcomes that are likely to result from a strategy of fighting a COIN war with the ultimate aim of negotiating a compromise with insurgent groups. Negotiated settlements, agreements that establish the parameters of

²⁸ See John Nagl. *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

²⁹ Huw Bennett. "The Other Side of the Coin: Minimum and Exemplary Force in British Army Counterinsurgency in Kenya." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* Volume 18, Issue (2007): 638—664.

³⁰ Dexter Filkins. "New Model for Afghan War-'Population is the Prize'." *New York Times* February 13, 2010.

³¹ Our coding procedures for COIN negotiations are reported more extensively in "Negotiating with the Taliban: The Timing & Consequences of Settlements in Foreign Power COIN Wars", Unpublished manuscript. Dept. of Political Science, University of North Texas, April 2010.

<http://www.psci.unt.edu/enterline/em-negotiations-v15.pdf>.

the post-conflict environment in host state, are relatively rare between COIN armies and insurgents, occurring in only 20% (7/35) of the cases. Furthermore, it is twice as likely (14/35) that a foreign power seeks and engages in negotiations primarily to extricate itself from a COIN war, rather than guarantee political conditions following an insurgency.

Second, when we examine the long-term implications of negotiations between foreign powers and insurgents, we find that durable negotiated settlements, such as the one that prevailed in Northern Ireland after the Good Friday Agreement signed in 1998, are rare events, comprising just 14% (5/35) of the sample. Our analysis also indicates that insurgents are more likely to secure long-term victory than are the COIN armies of foreign powers, a breakdown of 46% (16/35) to 34% (12/35), respectively. Furthermore, this distribution is a function of time, such that the longer a foreign power delays negotiating with insurgents, the less likely the foreign power is to secure a preferable long-term outcome. Yet, foreign powers, particularly those that engage in a change in strategy, are inclined to put off negotiations in the hope that additional fighting will increase leverage over negotiations and any policy outcome. In the case of the Obama Administration, this incentive to fight longer and increase pressure on Taliban insurgents is undermined by well known domestic pressure to end the American and allied military commitment to Afghanistan rapidly.

Finally, when the foreign power is a very powerful state, as is the United States in Afghanistan, few states can be relied upon to serve as guarantors to make any negotiated settlement “stick.” Those states that do have such a capacity may not provide such a guarantee due to strategic reasons, or simply because the tenacity of the insurgency portends the high cost of implementing a guarantee. Developments in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos following the Paris Peace Accords (1973) are instructive in this regard, suggesting that that when it is clear that a foreign power prefers extrication from a COIN war to bearing the costs necessary to achieve victory, but are capable depriving insurgents of outright victory, insurgents may engage in negotiations in order remove the foreign power so that the insurgency can continue unimpeded to its natural end.³²

Considered jointly, our analysis of the likely success of Gen. McChrystal's recently implemented COIN strategy as well as the likelihood of negotiation reveals a core paradox in the Obama Administration's policy in Afghanistan: The revised COIN strategy is being implemented too late to achieve military victory, and a publicly revealed preference for early exit constrains negatively the likelihood that negotiations will approach American and allied nations' ideal point in terms of acceptable negotiated solutions to the conflict. Indeed, our analysis suggests that negotiating parties rarely get more through negotiations than the equilibrium achieved on the battlefield. Regardless of

³² Additionally, these cases also demonstrate the limits to which benefactors can control the insurgents they support. While the North Vietnamese were linked to the communist insurgents in Laos and Cambodia, North Vietnam's leverage on communist insurgencies in these two countries was often limited; indeed, violent conflicts sometimes erupted between the North Vietnamese benefactor and its subordinate insurgents in Laos and Cambodia.

the the outcome of the contemporary war in Afghanistan, it is also important to consider the long-term implications of Obama's policy for the macro-policy goal of American and allied security, which we examine next.

IS THE FUTURE OF AFGHANISTAN YEMEN?

On Christmas Day 2009, a passenger of Nigerian origin attempted to blow up an American airliner upon which he was a passenger by lighting explosives sewn into his undergarments. The terrorist attack was thwarted by vigilant passengers, but its broader implications bear on our essay in terms of assessing the likely impact of the Obama Administration's Afghanistan policy for long-term American security. The terror suspect, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, is purported to have been trained by Al Qaeda in Yemen. Yemen is a state that was the subject of two previous foreign power COINs, the Egyptian intervention during the North Yemen Civil War (1962—70) and the British departure during the Aden Emergency (1963--76). To what degree does the experience of a foreign power COIN increase the chances that a target state will be a security threat in 10, 15, or 20 years? Is Yemen the future of Afghanistan?

To explore these questions, we begin by employing the aforementioned sample of 67 cases of foreign power COIN occurring during the twentieth century.³³ We pair this sample of states with the data reported in the Fund for Peace's *Failed States Index 2009*.³⁴ The Failed States Index (FSI) contains rankings in 2009 for 190 states for 12 political, economic, and social categories, including: demographic pressures, refugees, inter-group vengeance-seeking, human flight, uneven economic development and decline, criminalization of the state, deterioration of government services, arbitrary application of rule of law, autonomy of security organizations, factionalized elites, and intervention by external actors. Our analysis of FSI is driven by the following question: Given that a state experienced a prior foreign power COIN, what is the state's post-COIN performance on the FSI coded in 2009? Our sample reflects variation in the length of time between the terminal year of foreign power COIN and the FSI coding year of 2009, and it is this very variation that enables us to simulate Afghanistan futures.³⁵

We proceed with a brief analysis reflecting two foci. First, we examine whether the experience of a foreign power COIN correlates with poorer performance on the FSI

³³ Some of the foreign power COINs are fought in colonial territories. To facilitate our analysis, we associate said territories with the sovereign states that correspond to these erstwhile colonies.

³⁴ The *Failed States Index* is compiled in collaboration with *Foreign Policy Magazine*. The index is available in electronic form at

http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=391&Itemid=549. We use the data contained in the file "fsi_2009.xls." The accompanying article in *Foreign Policy Magazine* is located online at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/22/the_2009_failed_states_index.

³⁵ More precisely, of the 28 cases of foreign power COIN, the mean duration between the COIN termination and the year 2009 is 30 years, with a standard deviation of 14 years, and a minimum and maximum of 0 and 53, respectively.

indices (i.e., post-COIN states are more likely to reflect the attributes associated with state failure) by comparing post-foreign power COIN states with the remaining states in the 190-state FSI sample. Second, we examine whether post-foreign power COIN states improve (i.e., become less failed) over time. Our analysis of the 190-state FSI sample considers the impact of foreign power COIN involvement on FSI's total score of state failure, with greater values reflecting greater state failure across the 12 political, social, and economic categories. The total, or aggregate, score ranges in value from 18.3 (least failed, Norway) to 114.7 (most failed, Somalia), with a mean value of 72 (mean failed, Paraguay.)

A simple bivariate regression analysis indicates that states with histories of foreign power COINs are more likely to reflect *greater degrees of failure* in the FSI 2009 index. Indeed, we find that the experience of a foreign power COIN is likely to increase the degree of failure from a total failure score of about 70 (Ukraine, Albania, Samoa) by about 15 points to an approximate total score of 85 (Angola, Moldova, the Philippines.) This pattern is repeated uniformly in our individual analysis of the impact of foreign power COIN on the 12 dimensions underlying the FSI total aggregate score. Post-foreign power COIN states are more likely, for example, to violate human rights, experience economic decline, have governments that are unable to provide basic services, and be subject to foreign intervention. In fact, of the 28 states experiencing foreign power COINs occurring during the post-1950 period, the mean degree of failure is 84 (Angola), and is a sample reflecting states with chronic political, social and economic shortcomings.

To this point, our analysis provides little leverage on the question of whether states that experience foreign power COINs become more or less likely to reflect failure as they endure. To examine this question, we identify the duration (in years) between the terminal year of a foreign power COIN and the year 2009 for the 28 cases that occurred in our sample during the 1950--2009 period, and correlate this with the FSI aggregate failure score. Our analysis suggests no significant relationship between duration and failure score, a finding that illustrates the significant hurdle that foreign powers face in seeking to nation-build non-threatening states while at the same time prosecuting a COIN war.³⁶ Furthermore, given that foreign power COINs do significantly retard positive changes in degree of failure, one might argue that COIN wars, even when a foreign power defeats the insurgents, do not alter the the underlying political, social, and economic conditions that promote state failure, as we noted, above.

It is useful to consider the state failure trajectories of foreign power COIN wars fought by the United States during the twentieth century. Of the seven countries that experienced American intervention in our sample (i.e., Vietnam, El Salvador, Nicaragua, the

³⁶ Although a moderate, negative relationship was initially identified between the passage of time and the FSI total score, regression diagnostics suggest that this relationship is the result of undue influence by outlying observations. For example, the recent intervention in Somalia by Ethiopia (2006--2009) (minimal passage of time) and Northern Ireland (nominally a part of Britain, which has a very low FSI score.) Once these outliers are accounted for in our analysis, the negative relationship between time and FSI disappears.

Philippines, Cambodia, Laos, and Haiti), each state is greater than the mean total score for the 190-state FSI sample. Within this sub-sample of past American COIN states, several lessons about the paths of post-COIN states are suggested. For example, the defeat of the United States in a COIN (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos) corresponded to a radical transformation of the COIN state's political system. At the same time, instances of COIN success (the Philippines, Haiti, El Salvador) suggest that, first, military victory may not alter significantly the underlying forces that shape a state's proclivity to fail, and second, that it can take decades, even generations, for post-COIN states to stabilize.

Yet, important variation exists even in this sub-sample. The post-COIN histories of El Salvador and the Philippines are perhaps instructive in this regard. While El Salvador successfully integrated insurgents into the post-COIN society, the Philippines continues to fight separatist insurgents. In fact, an American COIN unit---the Joint Special Operations Task Force--Philippines---remains in the Philippines as of spring 2010 to assist in fighting several separatist groups more than 100 years after the United States took control of the Philippines from the Spanish following the Spanish-American War (1898).³⁷

Last, while the sub-sample of American post-COIN states are more failure prone than average, anecdotally, it appears that none of these states poses a direct threat to American security along the lines of Al Qaeda. Is this pattern due to a systematic policy implemented by the United States, or is it simply due to chance? Space does not permit us to explore these questions here, but they are worthy of exploration if we are to understand the long-term implications of the American-led COIN in Afghanistan.

CONCLUSION

Will Obama's policy in Afghanistan succeed? The multi-dimensional evidence that we marshal here indicates a long road head for American foreign policy in Afghanistan, and one that is unlikely to generate either a decisive outcome or clearcut security dividends. Historically, while the material resources of foreign powers enabled them to stave off defeat, or even prosecute a COIN successfully, the costs in blood and treasure, and the adverse impact of such an investment on the domestic political arena, sapped foreign powers' willingness to continue fighting. Furthermore, the historical record suggests that foreign powers wishing to extricate themselves from a COIN war find military victory and negotiated settlement elusive outcomes.

Ultimately, in assessing the likely success of Obama's policy in Afghanistan it is perhaps useful to return to our discussion above about the role of micro-level policies designed to serve broader, macro-level policy goals, such as American allied national security. We note the contradiction present between the goal of expedient extrication from this war and the strategy designed to achieve this goal, a "hearts and minds" approach that historically requires several years to implement. In our view, the discontinuity between

³⁷ Thom Shanker. "U.S. Counterinsurgency Unit to Stay in Philippines." *New York Times* August 21, 2009.

policy goals and means that the strategy is likely to bear little fruit in Afghanistan. The question, then, is whether post-COIN Afghanistan will resemble the Philippines, Cambodia, or Yemen, and whether this future is significantly different from futures that alternative, counterfactual strategies, such as policing Afghanistan remotely, might facilitate.

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Table 1. Strategy Change and Negotiation in Counter-insurgency Wars Fought by Foreign Powers (N=67).

	COIN War	Start	End	Foreign Power	Strategy Change?	Insurgents Defeated?	Negotiation Type	Longterm Outcome
1	Second Boer War	1899	1902	Britain	Yes	Yes	N	ID
2	Philippine American War	1899	1902	United States	Yes	Yes		
3	Moro Rebellion	1903	1913	United States	Yes	Yes	CN	ID
4	Herero and Namaqua Wars	1904	1908	Germany	Yes	Yes		
5	Maji Maji Rebellion	1905	1907	Germany	No	Yes		
6	Sokehs Rebellion	1910	1911	Germany	No	Yes		
7	Rif War	1910	1934	Spain	No	Yes		
8	Cacos Insurgency	1915	1934	United States	Yes	Yes	AFP	ID
9	Basmachi Revolt	1916	1931	Russia	Yes	Yes	AFP	ID
10	The Irish War of Independence	1916	1923	Britain	Yes	No	N	IV
11	Kaocen Revolt	1916	1917	France/Britain	No	Yes		
12	Greater Poland Uprising	1918	1919	Germany	No	No		
13	The Euphrates Revolt	1919	1920	Britain	No	Yes		
14	Turkish War of Independence	1919	1923	Greece	No	No		
15	Klaipeda Revolt	1923	1923	France	No	No		
16	Syrian Revolution	1925	1927	France	Yes	Yes		
17	Rif War	1925	1934	France	No	Yes		
18	PKI anti-Dutch Revolt	1926	1926	Dutch	No	Yes		
19	Occupation of Nicaragua	1927	1933	United States	No	No		
20	Second Italo--Abyssinian War	1935	1940	Italy	Yes	Yes		
21	Arab Revolt	1936	1939	Britain	Yes	Yes		
22	Chechnya Insurgency	1940	1944	Russia	No	Yes		
23	Yugoslav People's Liberation War	1941	1944	Germany	No	No	C	IV
24	Yugoslav People's Liberation War	1941	1943	Italy	No	No	C	IV
25	Warsaw Uprising	1944	1944	Germany	Yes	No	N	ID
26	Slovak National Uprising	1944	1945	Germany	Yes	Yes		
27	The Forest Brothers Rebellion	1944	1953	Soviet Union	Yes	Yes		
28	Ukraine	1945	1956	Soviet Union	Yes	Yes		
29	Indonesian National Revolution	1945	1949	Dutch	No	No	N	IV
30	Prague Uprising	1945	1945	Germany	No	Yes	N	ID
31	Hukbalahap Rebellion	1946	1954	United States	Yes	Yes	N	ID
32	French Indochina War	1946	1954	France	Yes	No	N	IV
33	Greek Civil War	1946	1949	Britain/USA	Yes	Yes	AI	ID
34	Malagasy Uprising	1947	1948	France	Yes	Yes		
35	Malayan Emergency	1948	1960	Britain	Yes	Yes		
36	Kenyan Emergency	1952	1960	Britain	Yes	Yes		
37	Algerian War of Independence	1954	1962	France	Yes	Yes	N	IV

38	Cyprus	1955	1960	Britain	Yes	No	N	PS, A
39	French Cameroon	1955	1970	France	No	Yes		
40	Hungarian Revolution	1956	1956	Soviet Union	Yes	Yes		
41	Tibet	1956	1972	China	No	Yes		
42	Ifni War	1957	1958	Spain/France	No	Yes		
43	Vietnam War	1959	1975	United States	Yes	No	N	IV
44	Eritrean War of Independence Guinea-Bissau War of	1961	1991	Ethiopia	Yes	No		
45	Independence	1962	1974	Portugal	Yes	Yes	N	IV
46	Dhofar Rebellion	1962	1976	Britain	Yes	Yes		
47	North Yemen Civil War	1962	1970	Egypt	Yes	No	N	ID
48	Aden Emergency Indonesia-Malaysia	1963	1976	Britain	No	No	AFP	IV
49	Confrontation	1963	1967	Britain	Yes	Yes		
50	Mozambican Civil War	1964	1975	Portugal	Yes	No	AFP	IV
51	Laos	1964	1973	United States	Yes	No	N	IV
52	Angolan War of Liberation	1966	1974	Portugal	Yes	No	CN	IV
53	Namibian War of Independence	1966	1990	South Africa	Yes	No	N	IV
54	Northern Ireland	1968	1998	Britain	Yes	Yes	N	PS
55	Chadian Civil War	1969	1978	France	No	Yes	N	ID
56	Cambodian Civil War	1970	1975	United States	No	No	AFP	IV
57	East Timor	1975	1999	Indonesia	Yes	Yes	N	IV
58	Angolan Civil War	1975	1990	Cuba	No	Yes	N	ID
59	Cambodia	1978	1990	Vietnam	No	No	N	ID
60	Soviet-Afghan War	1979	1989	Soviet Union Cuba/Soviet	Yes	No	N	IV
61	Nicaraguan Resistance	1979	1989	Union	No	No	N	PS
62	El Salvadoran Civil War	1981	1992	United States	No	No	N	PS
63	Sri Lankan Civil War	1987	1990	India	No	No		
64	Tajikistan	1992	1997	Russia	No	No	N	PS
65	First Chechen War	1994	1996	Russia	No	No	N	A
66	Second Chechen War	1999	2009	Russia	Yes	Yes		
67	Somalia	2006	2009	Ethiopia	Yes	No	N	A

Note: N=Negotiation; AFP=Attempted by Foreign Power; AI=Attempted by Insurgents; C=Collaboration; CN=Collaboration and Negotiations; M=Military Outcome; NS=Negotiated Settlement; NW=Negotiated Withdrawal; W=Withdrawal; IV=Insurgent Victory; ID=Insurgent Defeat; PS=Peace Settlement; and A=Ambiguous.

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