Testing Obama's Withdrawal Timeline Hypothesis in Afghanistan

by

Michael Koprowski

Department of Political Science
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

Peter Feaver, Chair

Henry Brands, Supervisor

David Paletz

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Political Science
in the Graduate School of Duke University

2011

ABSTRACT

Testing Obama's Withdrawal Timeline Hypothesis in Afghanistan

by

Michael Koprowski

Department of Political Science
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

Peter Feaver, Chair

Henry Brands, Supervisor

David Paletz

An abstract of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Political Science
in the Graduate School of Duke University

2011

Copyright by
Michael Koprowski
2011

Abstract

The Obama Administration argued that a publicly announced withdrawal timeline would help further US counterinsurgency (COIN) objectives in Afghanistan by incentivizing better behavior from the Karzai government and the Afghan people. An endless troop commitment, the Administration believed, fostered a dependency that allowed, and possibly even encouraged, poor governance and rampant corruption to persist – a timeline, it claimed, would sever the continual dependency by signaling that US commitment would not last forever, serving to focus, energize, and quicken the Karzai government’s efforts to build a secure, durable, self-sufficient state. Moreover, it argued, a timeline would send a message of urgency to the Afghan people to take charge of their own affairs and to consent to their government’s rule in greater numbers. In this essay, I test the “Obama timeline hypothesis” in order to determine whether it is truly likely to produce the positive change that the Administration claims it will. By utilizing a mix of consistent historical predictors, deductive logic based on contemporary COIN theory, and currently available evidence, I conclude that the withdrawal timeline has not produced, and likely will not produce, the results that the Administration claimed it would and that, on the whole, it has likely engendered perverse incentives for the Karzai government and the Afghan people that run contrary to America’s desired COIN objectives. More broadly, the Afghan case, along with America’s recent experience in Iraq, should make US policymakers deeply skeptical of assertions that withdrawal timelines can serve as an effective policy tool for changing the behaviors of key regional actors.

Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Contemporary US COIN Doctrine in Afghanistan.....	4
Chapter 2: Obama’s Timeline Hypothesis Explained.....	8
Chapter 3: The Validity of Obama’s Timeline Hypothesis.....	16
Chapter 4: The 2010 Iraqi Impasse.....	41
Chapter 5: Policy Implications.....	46
Bibliography.....	51

Introduction

In order to improve the trajectory of the war in Afghanistan, President Obama endorsed a “fully-resourced,” population-centric counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy that aims to drive a wedge between the insurgents and the population. On December 1, 2009, at an address at West Point, President Obama announced that he would deploy 30,000 additional troops to support the COIN effort in Afghanistan. The troops would be sent “at the fastest possible pace,” starting in early 2010, with a goal of starting to withdraw forces from the country in July 2011.¹ The Obama Administration argued that the COIN strategy would break the Taliban’s momentum and increase Afghan capacity by July 2011, which would allow for the beginning of a troop withdrawal. The July 2011 date, though, only heralds the *beginning* of a withdrawal. According to the President, the actual pace of the transition and rapidity of substantial troop withdrawals is not fixed to a timeline, but rather dependent on “conditions on the ground.”² Still, one thing was made clear: after July 2011, America’s mission in Afghanistan would not expand – it would only contract. In November 2010, the Obama Administration added further detail to its overall exit strategy. At a NATO Lisbon Summit, the Administration, along with other NATO leaders, announced its goal for Afghan security forces to assume full responsibility for security by the end of 2014, as originally requested by President Karzai.³ If July 2011 marks the beginning of an exit process, then the end of 2014 would mark its general conclusion.

The Obama Administration sold the withdrawal timeline as an improved policy from the days of the Bush Administration. An endless troop commitment, the Obama Administration believed, fostered a dependency that allowed, and possibly even encouraged, poor governance and

¹ President Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, 1 December 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>.

² Ibid.

³ “NATO Plans for 2014 Afghan Pullout,” *Associated Press*, 19 November 2010, http://www.military.com/news/article/nato-readies-2014-afghan-pullout-at-summit.html?ESRC=sm_todayinmil.nl.

rampant corruption to persist in Afghanistan – a timeline, it claimed, would sever the continual dependency by signaling that US commitment would not last forever, serving to focus, energize, and quicken the Karzai government’s efforts to build a secure, durable, self-sufficient state. Moreover, it argued, a timeline would send a message of urgency to the Afghan people to take charge of their own affairs and to consent to their government’s rule in greater numbers. Later in this essay, I will develop these ideas more deeply; for now, suffice it to say that the Administration claimed that a timeline would serve to incentivize both the Karzai government and the Afghan people to adjust their behavioral path in support of US COIN objectives. My overall goal in this essay is to examine the “Obama timeline hypothesis” in order to determine whether it is truly likely to produce the positive change that the Administration claims it will. In the final analysis, I conclude that the withdrawal timeline has not produced, and likely will not produce, the results that the Administration claimed it would and that, on the whole, it has likely engendered perverse incentives for the Karzai government and the Afghan people that run contrary to America’s desired COIN objectives.

Roadmap

This essay proceeds in five chapters. First, I will provide a brief theoretical overview of contemporary American COIN doctrine. Before anything else, we must establish which kinds of incentives the US COIN strategy seeks to produce for the host government and the local population. Second, I will explore Obama’s withdrawal timeline hypothesis, specifically how the Administration claimed the timeline would help produce the “right” incentives for the Karzai government and the Afghan people. This chapter of the essay asks: If the Obama timeline hypothesis is correct, what should we expect to see happen with these key actors? Third, I will evaluate the overall validity of the Obama Administration’s claims. Through the combined use of consistent historical predictors and deductive logic based on contemporary COIN theory, I will demonstrate that the timeline seems unlikely to produce the “right” incentives. Moreover, a review of currently available evidence strongly suggests that the timeline has not altered the behavioral path of the Karzai government or the Afghan people in any significant way thus far, as the Administration asserted it would. Fourth, I

will examine a relatively recent, yet fairly comparable case, to help further illuminate the issue of withdrawal timelines and contemporary US COIN doctrine: President Obama's rigid adherence to a withdrawal timeline in Iraq. Finally, I will delve more deeply into the policy implications raised by my analysis.

Of course, the war will not be won or lost based on the timeline variable alone. Many other variables are in play (the security momentum, increased US troop levels, the Taliban's military and political response, etc.), and each creates its own unique incentive for the Karzai government and the Afghan people. How these actors ultimately behave will depend on some combination of these variables, all of which cannot possibly be addressed in this essay. With so many variables in play, I will not be able to establish a direct causal relationship between the withdrawal timeline and any particular behavioral outcome. Rather, my aim is to evaluate the claims and assertions of the Obama Administration when it publicly sold the timeline. Are its claims likely to come to fruition and, if not, what is the probable explanation?

Chapter 1: Contemporary US COIN Doctrine in Afghanistan

The fundamental logic of America's contemporary, population-centric COIN doctrine is as follows: Insurgency is not simply random violence; rather, it is violence to achieve a political objective.¹ Insurgents, by definition, aim to overthrow or secede from the status quo government, while counterinsurgents, by definition, aim to "reinforce the state and so defeat the internal challenge."² To be successful, insurgents require support from the local population, usually in the form of financial assistance, safe havens and hide-outs, morale, logistics, supplies, and, most importantly, new recruits.³ The more the populace sways toward supporting the insurgency, the more likely it is that the insurgency will achieve its political goals.⁴ Similarly, the indigenous government also depends on support from the population to survive and to hold off the insurgency. A government that lacks the support of its people is inherently unstable because the insurgency will likely be able to mobilize sufficient numbers to depose the existing regime, eventually. As the US Army COIN Field Manual points out, "because of the ease of sowing disorder, it is usually not enough for counterinsurgents to get 51 percent of popular support; a solid majority is often essential. However, a passive populace may be all that is necessary for a well-supported insurgency to seize political power."⁵ COIN efforts are, essentially, battles to "court" the population through persuasion. As David Kilcullen, COIN expert and former senior advisor to both General Petraeus and General McChrystal, explains: "The center of gravity of an insurgent movement – the source of

¹ US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24, *Department of the Army*, December 2006, p. 1-13, <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf>; Seth Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan*, W.W. Norton & Company, 2009, p. 152.

² David Kilcullen, "Counterinsurgency Redux," *Small Wars Journal*, Accessed 28 January 2011, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/kilcullen1.pdf>.

³ US Government Counterinsurgency Guide, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, *Department of State*, January 2009, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/119629.pdf>; US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24, p. 1-20.

power from which it derives its morale, its physical strength, its freedom of action, and its will to act – is its connectivity with the local population.”⁶

Both sides (the counterinsurgent and the insurgent), in an effort to win the battle of public support, seek to establish legitimacy with locals. According to most Western counterinsurgency experts, in order to convince the populace of its legitimacy, the indigenous government must perform the basic functions of a state, such as providing for the security of its citizens, extracting and appropriating national resources, providing basic services, regulating commercial and social relationships,⁷ and stimulating long-term economic growth to generate “confidence in the government while at the same time reducing the pool of frustrated, unemployed young men and women from which insurgents can readily recruit.”⁸ Various studies and existing theories demonstrate that people frequently join or assist an insurgency due to grievance, whether it is political, economic, social, or some combination thereof.⁹ By addressing these grievances with better governance, the state will be seen as competent and legitimate in the eyes of those it seeks to govern. Insurgents, however, try to undermine the government’s legitimacy by making it impossible for the government to perform the basic functions of a state, and sometimes insurgents even attempt to usurp those functions altogether. History demonstrates that insurgents frequently establish their own local political legitimacy, legal codes, court systems, taxation policies, and economic regulation, in an effort to provide a viable governance alternative to that of the current state. Some classical theorists, such as David Galula, frame COIN as a competition for governance between a state and a non-state challenger.¹⁰ Bernard Fall, a French COIN theorist, wrote in 1965 that a government which is losing to an insurgency “is not being outfought; it is being out-administered.”¹¹

⁶ David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 7.

⁷ US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24, p. 1-21; Stephen Carter and Kate Clark, “No Shortcut to Stability: Justice, Politics, and Insurgency in Afghanistan,” *Chatham House*, December 2010, http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/18074_1210pr_afghanjustice.pdf.

⁸ US Government Counterinsurgency Guide, p. 3.

⁹ Ideas attributed to the Contemporary Insurgent Warfare Course (CIWC), USAF Special Operations School, Hurlburt Field AFB, FL. I personally attended in summer 2009.

¹⁰ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, Praeger Security International, 1964.

¹¹ Bernard Fall, “The Theory and Practice of Counterinsurgency,” *Naval War College Review*, April 1965.

Other studies demonstrate that locals who actively and/or passively support an insurgency are not always motivated by particular personal grievances, but also by the basic desire to stay alive and avoid retribution. Stathis Kalyvas, in *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (2006), analyzed a series of fieldwork studies from various conflicts and demonstrated that people tend to support the government in areas where government presence is strongest. Likewise, people tend to support the insurgency in areas where insurgent presence is strongest. Essentially, locals are forced to cooperate with the strongest group in their area, in order to survive and avoid punishment, and they will switch sides as power shifts occur.¹² The harsh reality is that people choose sides based on a self-interest calculus in an uncertain world: Which side is most able to penetrate society by establishing a normative system of order, control, and predictability? Are my grievances most likely to be alleviated by the state or the insurgency? Will I be on the side of the eventual winners? Will I survive if I choose the losing side? In this sense, population-centric COIN is about convincing locals that it is in their self-interest to join with the current state.

Long-term success necessitates that the population sees its own government as competent enough and durable enough to maintain security and good governance after foreign forces leave. This is the reason that the current US Army COIN Field Manual informs counterinsurgents that “the host nation doing something tolerably is normally better than us doing it well.”¹³ As the host government’s legitimacy increases, the theory goes, the people will begin to more actively support it, which will isolate and marginalize the insurgency. Without local support, the insurgency loses its lifeline and strength. By driving a wedge between the insurgency and the population, remnants of the insurgency, isolated, irrelevant, and now popularly perceived as criminals rather than “freedom fighters,” will have little support and few places to hide, ultimately forcing the vast majority of them to lay down their arms and reconcile with the government, or face the consequences.

¹² Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge University Press, 2006; Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, pp. 150-151.

¹³ US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24, p. 1-27.

Political reconciliation, though, probably will not be achieved until the insurgents are convinced that they are unlikely to be successful, therefore making the better option to stop fighting and reconcile. In other words, an insurgency that possesses the momentum, and thinks that it will be successful, is an insurgency that is unlikely to engage in serious reconciliation.¹⁴ For this reason, the initial focus of the US COIN strategy is to drive a wedge between the insurgents and the population by improving security and strengthening the Karzai government's legitimacy – if that happens, it will reverse the Taliban's momentum and then, and only then, can America hope for genuine reconciliation. In theory, this is how the war ends acceptably for the US, with a capable, legitimate host government that is popularly supported and an insurgency that is marginalized and brought into the existing order.

When examining the theory, it becomes readily apparent that contemporary US COIN doctrine is essentially about giving each significant actor an incentive to behave in a certain way. The indigenous government should be incentivized to provide good governance, which will enhance its legitimacy and standing. The local populace should be incentivized to abandon the insurgency and throw its support behind the government which, ideally, should be improving its act with each day. Once the insurgents are isolated from the population, and it becomes clear that their prospects for success are low, the insurgents should be incentivized to lay down their arms and reconcile with the existing government. As we will see in the next chapter, the Obama Administration has claimed that the introduction of a public withdrawal timeline will serve as a powerful force for incentivizing the Karzai government and the Afghan people to behave in ways that are consistent with these objectives, which would help reverse the Taliban's momentum and improve the overall situation in the country.

¹⁴ This claim follows logically from COIN theory. It has been made explicit by various experts and administration officials. See Defense Secretary Robert Gates quoted in Elisabeth Bumiller, "Gates Visits Afghanistan to Meet with Karzai and NATO Commanders," *New York Times*, 8 March 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/09/world/asia/09military.html>; Also see Gates quoted in Dexter Filkins, "The Taliban Don't Seem Ready to Talk," *New York Times*, 23 January 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/24/weekinreview/24filkins.html>; Also see Dexter Filkins' analysis and quotes by C.I.A. Director Leon Panetta in Dexter Filkins, "Taliban Elite, Aided by NATO, Join Talks for Afghan Peace," *New York Times*, 19 October 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/20/world/asia/20afghan.html>.

Chapter 2: Obama's Timeline Hypothesis Explained

In total, there are three plausible logics behind the withdrawal timeline policy.¹ The first plausible logic is that a withdrawal timeline can serve as an effective policy tool for getting America out of an unpopular dilemma in a distant land – in short, to avoid another Vietnam quagmire. This logic seems to most closely resemble that of Vice President Biden's, as he warned Obama during the Afghan strategy review to avoid getting “locked into Vietnam.”² Moreover, judging from his public statements, it is Biden who appears most resolute in ensuring that sizeable troop drawdowns occur on time. The second plausible logic is that the withdrawal timeline would help assuage certain war-weary domestic constituencies. According to Bob Woodward's recent book, *Obama's Wars*, President Obama decided to issue the July 2011 date, in large part, to prevent losing the “whole Democratic Party.”³ As many Democrats became increasingly frustrated and disillusioned with the war effort, he believed that a beginning withdrawal date – a light at the end of the tunnel – would help maintain public support and buy the Administration some time, particularly among skeptical Democrats. Presumably, this second logic would extend to another war-weary, skeptical audience – the international community and the NATO Coalition, more specifically. As European public opinion continues to slide in opposition to the Afghan war, a withdrawal timeline may help to bide time with them, too, which is perhaps why the Administration decided on the 2014 date in consultation with NATO leaders and publicly announced this deadline at a NATO summit. The third plausible logic is that the withdrawal timeline, by signaling that US commitment was not endless, would send a message of urgency to the Karzai government and the Afghan people that they need to take charge of their own affairs and work more quickly to institute significant reforms, which would accelerate

¹ During a thesis advisor meeting, Professor Peter Feaver suggested the “three logics” approach as a way to frame my discussion, Durham, North Carolina, 26 January 2011.

² Bob Woodward, “Biden Warned Obama during Afghan War Review not to get ‘locked into Vietnam,’” *Washington Post*, 28 September 2010, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/27/AR2010092704850_2.html?sid=ST2010092805438.

³ President Barack Obama quoted in Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, Simon & Schuster Publishers, New York, September 2010, p. 336.

progress more generally and improve the overall ground situation. In this essay, I focus exclusively on the third logic because it is what the Obama Administration used to publicly sell the timeline policy as a good idea. The first and second plausible logics, of course, were never publicly acknowledged and were mostly implied, after-the-fact, by an investigative journalist (Woodward) who was, perhaps surprisingly, granted deep access into the Obama White House. Instead, the third logic – which I dub the “timeline hypothesis” – became the public face of the timeline policy, and the goal of this essay is to test the claims of this third logic.

President Obama echoed the third logic when he originally announced the July 2011 date at West Point, stating that the timeline would make it “clear to the Afghan government - and, more importantly, to the Afghan people - that they will ultimately be responsible for their own country.”⁴ The very next day, Defense Secretary Robert Gates reiterated this sentiment, testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee that it was necessary to put a timeline on US commitment to “build a fire” under the Afghan government.⁵ Also, on that same day, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs argued that a timeline would signal to the Afghan government that it must “change its behavior and take charge...there can’t be a permanent dependence on us being there.”⁶ General Petraeus, testifying at his own confirmation hearing in June 2010, said that the July 2011 timeline sends an important “message of urgency” to the Afghans:

“Productivity experts say that there’s no greater productivity tool than a deadline. The message of urgency that the deadline conveyed was not just for domestic political purposes. It was for audiences in [the Afghan capital of] Kabul, who...needed to be reminded that we won’t be there forever.”⁷

The progressive think-tank, the Center for American Progress (CAP), advocates the White House’s position fairly well. Caroline Wadhams, Director for South Asia Security Studies at CAP, in a report titled, “Why We Should Keep to the July 2011 Timeline in Afghanistan,” argues that the

⁴ President Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” 1 December 2009.

⁵ Defense Secretary Robert Gates quoted in Huma Khan, “Gates Says Afghan Withdrawal Deadline May be Delayed,” *ABC News*, 2 December 2009, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Afghanistan/afghanistan-president-obama-lays-strategy-troop-surge/story?id=9224638>.

⁶ White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs quoted in *Ibid*.

⁷ General David Petraeus quoted in Jim Garamone, “Petraeus Discusses Pros, Cons of July 2011 Deadline,” *American Forces Press Service*, 29 June 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=59837>.

timeline creates “urgency for policymakers in Afghanistan and its neighbors, the United States, and NATO-ISAF countries,” which would help alleviate the “strategic drift” that characterized Afghan policy for seven years. Moreover, the timeline “expands U.S. leverage with the Afghan government by demonstrating our willingness to determine our own troop levels and involvement based on our assessment and not on the Afghan government’s” and it “increases the pressure on the Afghan government and Afghan security forces to take a leadership role in their own affairs.”⁸

Yet, the third logic incorporates not only the message of urgency engendered by the timeline itself, but also the fact that the timeline is being used synergistically with a sizeable “surge” in US troop levels. The timeline indicates that US commitment is not open-ended, while the surge of 30,000 additional troops made clear that the US would be around for a while and that it was truly serious about reversing the Taliban’s momentum. Together, according to the logic, the timeline and the surge would provide a powerful incentive for the Karzai government and the Afghan people to improve their acts now, while they still have the major backing of the US. Colin Kahl, Georgetown professor and current Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East, calls this logic a strategy of “conditional engagement,” rather than the “unconditional engagement” that characterized the Bush years. Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, in June/July 2008, Kahl argued that the strategy of “conditional engagement” proved effective in Iraq by helping to turn many Anbaris against al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Many Sunnis in Anbar, Kahl asserted, feared a significant US withdrawal because they watched growing public opposition to the war in the US and they watched the Democratic Party win both houses of Congress in the November 2006 mid-term elections. According to Major General John Allen, who was responsible for tribal engagement in Anbar in 2007, the Democratic victory and rising tide of pro-withdrawal sentiment in the US “did not go unnoticed” by the Sunni leaders and they “talked about it all the time.” According to Allen, his troops reinforced the message sent by the Democratic takeover by saying to Sunni leaders that “we are leaving...we don't know when we are leaving, but we don't have much time, so you [the Anbaris] better get after this.” Though the Bush

⁸ Caroline Wadhams, “Why We Should Keep to the July 2011 Timeline in Afghanistan,” *Center for American Progress*, 8 September 2010, http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/09/afghanistan_timeline.html.

Administration refused to issue an explicit withdrawal timeline, Kahl argued, the threat of withdrawal became quickly apparent to the Sunni Anbaris nonetheless because of the changing domestic atmosphere in America. As Kahl claims, the Anbar Awakening was “driven in part by Democratic pressure to withdraw.” At the same time, though, the surge in troops proved equally important because it made clear that the US would not be leaving immediately and thus could protect groups who made the tough choices. On the whole, he argued, the surge and the threat of withdrawal interacted synergistically and, together, provided a strong incentive for Anbaris to behave in ways that furthered US COIN objectives.⁹ Even Candidate Obama, in a January 2008 debate, echoed this general view: “Much of that violence has been reduced because there was an agreement with tribes in Anbar province, Sunni tribes, who started to see, after the Democrats were elected in 2006, you know what?—the Americans may be leaving soon. And we are going to be left very vulnerable to the Shiites. We should start negotiating now. That’s how you change behavior.”¹⁰

It is fair to say that the Obama Administration has advocated a strategy of conditional engagement with Afghanistan; however, it has not relied on implicit signaling to create the threat of withdrawal – it has been utterly explicit, in the form of a publicly announced withdrawal timeline. Throughout his presidency, President Obama and his advisors have indicated a willingness to “get tough” with Karzai, arguing that the US could not expect quicker, more sustained progress so long as it coddled the Afghan government.¹¹ General Petraeus, in his confirmation hearings, echoed support for simultaneously employing the threat of withdrawal and the surge of US troop levels, stating: “And I did believe there was value in sending a message of urgency, which is how I interpreted July 2011 as...as well as the message of substantial commitment, the considerable

⁹ Colin Kahl, “When to Leave Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2008, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64458/colin-h-kahl-and-william-e-odom/when-to-leave-iraq>.

¹⁰ Senator Barack Obama’s Statements during a Democratic Presidential Candidate Debate, St. Anselm College, Manchester, New Hampshire, 5 January 2008, See transcript at *ABCNews.com*, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/DemocraticDebate/story?id=4092530&page=2>.

¹¹ Joshua Partlow and Scott Wilson, “Obama Presses Karzai for Cooperation,” *Washington Post*, 29 March 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/28/AR2010032800828.html>; Helene Cooper and Mark Landler, “US Now Trying Softer Approach Toward Karzai,” *New York Times*, 9 April 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/10/world/asia/10prexy.html>; Steve Kornacki, “Hillary’s First 100 Days,” *The New York Observer*, 21 January 2009, <http://www.observer.com/2009/politics/hillarys-first-100-days>.

additional forces that the President ordered as well as additional civilians' authorization for extra Afghan security forces and additional NATO forces as well."¹² In the end, according to the logic, the addition of 30,000 troops, coupled with the threat of withdrawal embedded in the timeline, would help produce the "right" incentives for the Karzai government and the Afghan people. Administration aides even gave this timeline logic a name – "max leverage" – which they believed captured the essence of its aims: putting tangible pressure on Afghans, in order to generate the largest impact from the troop surge in the shortest amount of time.¹³

It is important to note, though, that the explicit threat of withdrawal embedded in the timeline remains considerably ambiguous. Since its original announcement, Administration officials have issued seemingly contradictory public statements about the meaning of the July 2011 date. Perhaps this reflects an intentional desire for ambiguity, in an attempt to avoid "boxing" itself into a corner; more likely, though, if Bob Woodward's recent account in *Obama's Wars* is to be believed, it reflects serious disagreements within the Administration.¹⁴ In his West Point address, President Obama asserted that "after 18 months, our troops will begin to come home," with the pace of the withdrawal depending on conditions on the ground.¹⁵ Shortly after, Vice President Biden was quoted as saying, "In July of 2011, you're going to see a whole lot of people moving out. Bet on it."¹⁶ However, Vice President Biden's assertion has been contradicted by other officials, particularly within the defense establishment. On August 1, 2010, Secretary Gates told CNN's Christine Amanpour that "drawdowns early on will be of fairly limited numbers."¹⁷ Also, on September 2, 2010, he said that "Americans will still be here after July 2011," but "the American people need to

¹² General David Petraeus' Statements during his Confirmation Hearings before the House Armed Services Committee, 16 June 2010, Washington DC, <http://mediamatters.org/print/research/201006270005>.

¹³ Christi Parsons and Julian Barnes, "Afghanistan Pull Out Date," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 December 2009, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/dec/04/world/la-fg-obama-afghan4-2009dec04>.

¹⁴ Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars*

¹⁵ President Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan."

¹⁶ Vice President Joseph Biden quoted in Jonathan Alter, "Secrets from Inside the Obama War Room," *Newsweek*, 15 May 2010, <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/05/15/secrets-from-inside-the-obama-war-room.html>.

¹⁷ Defense Secretary Robert Gates quoted in interview with Christine Amanpour on "This Week," CNN, 1 August 2010, See transcript at *Real Clear Politics*, http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2010/08/01/interviews_with_speaker_pelosi__secretary_gates_on_this_week_106578.html.

know we are not still going to be fighting this fight 15 years from now.”¹⁸ On August 25, 2010, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mike Mullen, asserted: “We understand very clearly what is going to happen in July 2011. We will start to thin our forces, [but] that doesn’t mean we’re leaving in any kind of significant numbers.”¹⁹ On August 15, 2010, ISAF Commander, General David Petraeus, stated “that this is a date when a process begins that is conditions-based.”²⁰ Again seemingly contradicting other officials, Vice President Biden told *Meet the Press* on December 19, 2010 that the July 2011 drawdown would “not be a token amount.”²¹

Perhaps in order to lessen the obvious confusion surrounding the July 2011 date, the Obama Administration subsequently announced the end-of-2014 date by which Afghan security forces would assume full responsibility for their own security, but even this date carries considerable ambiguity. President Obama, speaking to reporters at the NATO Lisbon Summit, estimated that some activities would likely continue after 2014: “One thing I am pretty confident we will still be doing after 2014 is maintaining a counter-terrorism capability. It’s going to be pretty important to us to continue to have platforms to execute those counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan.”²² Marking a different tone, Vice President Biden told *Meet the Press* on December 19, 2010 that all US troops would be out of Afghanistan by the end of 2014 “come hell or high water.”²³ Despite the announcement of the 2014 date, the overall confusion remains. The questions still linger of how big the July 2011 drawdown will be; of what exactly happens in the critical period between July 2011 and the end of 2014; and of what exactly happens after 2014. As of now, it remains fair to say that the

¹⁸ Defense Secretary Robert Gates quoted in “Gates: US won’t ‘be fighting this fight’ in Afghanistan Indefinitely,” *CNN Wire Staff*, 2 September 2010, <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/09/02/afghanistan.gates/?hpt=T2#fbid=hHbhITOEHEc&wom=false>.

¹⁹ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Mike Mullen quoted in Michael Carden, “Mullen: Insurgents More Concerned with Fight than Timeline,” *American Forces Press Service*, 25 August 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=60594>.

²⁰ General David Petraeus quoted in interview with David Gregory on “Meet the Press,” *NBC*, 15 August 2010, See transcript at *MSNBC.com*, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/38686033/ns/meet_the_press-transcripts.

²¹ Vice President Biden quoted in interview with David Gregory on “Meet the Press,” *NBC*, 19 December 2010, <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2010/12/biden-2014-afghan-withdrawal-hell-high-water/>

²² President Barack Obama quoted in James Kirkup, “Lisbon: US and Britain Differ over Afghan Combat Exit in 2014,” *The Telegraph*, 20 November 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/politics/defence/8148892/Lisbon-US-and-Britain-differ-over-Afghan-combat-exit-in-2014.html>.

²³ Vice President Biden quoted in interview with David Gregory on “Meet the Press,” 19 December 2010.

Obama Administration, as a whole, has not provided clear answers, nor has it begun to deliberate on these questions in earnest. As one senior Administration official told the *Washington Post* on December 16, 2010, “The real debate will occur when we have to determine how big the July ’11 drawdown will be.” A senior military officer echoed this, saying that “there still are some very significant differences of opinion.”²⁴

Despite the ambiguity, an explicit threat of withdrawal has, nevertheless, been issued. If the Obama timeline hypothesis is correct, we should expect to see the behaviors of the Karzai government and the Afghan people change in a direction more in line with US COIN objectives. From the Karzai government, we should expect to see what the US has long demanded: better overall governance. This requires working aggressively to strengthen local governing institutions, particularly at the district level and below, by such acts as increasing local budgetary authority and encouraging local elections, instead of appointments, to engage more Afghans in the political process.²⁵ The most stable periods in modern Afghan history have been characterized by a weaker central state that recognized the importance of decentralized local power;²⁶ however, as it stands today, the Karzai government remains a highly centralized presidential system with power monopolized in Kabul. It also requires re-igniting “stalled” developmental programs to address the extant grievances on the streets; accelerating tax simplification processes and tax collection efforts to increase Afghanistan’s domestic revenue; and cracking down on corruption at all levels of government by bolstering the justice system, by professionalizing its staff, by vetting those already holding office, and by firing and prosecuting those who are thieves. Moreover, it requires developing a better working relationship with a Parliament that sometimes rejects large numbers of Karzai’s appointees, resulting in numerous vacant posts, which certainly does not bode well for improving

²⁴ Rajiv Chandrasekaran and Scott Wilson, “Administration’s Next Big Afghan Battle: How Many Troops to Withdraw,” *Washington Post*, 16 December 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/16/AR2010121600042.html?hpid=topnews>.

²⁵ Colin Cookman and Caroline Wadhams, “Governance in Afghanistan: Looking Ahead to What We Leave Behind,” *Center for American Progress*, May 2010, <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/05/pdf/afghangovernance.pdf>

²⁶ Seth Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, pp. 336-340.

governance.²⁷ More generally, if the Obama timeline hypothesis is correct, we should expect to see Afghan leaders, both in the Karzai Administration and in the Parliament, working more urgently to extend good governance, putting aside personal and ethnic bickering, and making the hard, but necessary, decisions to improve its legitimacy with the Afghan people.

Likewise, we should expect to see similar behavior from increasing numbers of the Afghan people, particularly within Pashtun tribes – that is, supporting and consenting to the legitimacy and actions of the Karzai government and assisting in strengthening its institutions. Additionally, we should expect to see more of those Afghans who are currently sitting on the fence to take sides in favor of the government, and more of those Afghans who are currently actively and/or passively supporting the insurgency to stop doing so and instead throw their support behind the government. This necessitates ending financial, operational, and logistical assistance to the Taliban, providing essential human intelligence (HUMINT) to Coalition and Afghan forces as to the Taliban's whereabouts and activities, and perhaps even formulating local defense initiatives (with ISAF help) to block against Taliban influence. As Ben Rhodes, a deputy national security advisor in the Obama Administration, said: "We want the Afghans to understand that we're going to be expecting more out of them, so to the extent that it [the timeline] conveys a sense of urgency, that's an important message."²⁸ Overall, according to the Administration's timeline hypothesis, with the Karzai government working more urgently to improve its legitimacy and the Afghan people working more urgently toward a future without the insurgency, the situation on the ground will improve. In the next chapter of this essay, I will evaluate the validity of the Obama timeline hypothesis: Are its claims likely to come to fruition and, if not, what is the probable explanation?

²⁷ Alissa Rubin, "Many Karzai Afghan Cabinet Choices are Rejected," *New York Times*, 2 January 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/03/world/asia/03afghan.html?_r=1.

²⁸ Ben Rhodes quoted in Peter Baker, "With Shift in Afghanistan, Talk Turns to Exit," *New York Times*, 28 June 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/29/world/asia/29prexy.html?_r=1.

Chapter 3: The Validity of Obama's Timeline Hypothesis

The Obama Administration explicitly claims that the timeline will help incentivize positive behavioral change for two key actors: 1) the host government and 2) the local populace. In what follows, I will thoroughly examine both actors: the Karzai government and the Afghan people. By utilizing consistent historical predictors and deductive logic based on contemporary COIN theory, I will demonstrate that Obama's timeline appears unlikely to help produce the "right" incentives for both the Karzai government and the Afghan people. Furthermore, a review of currently available evidence strongly suggests that the timeline has not changed the behavioral trajectory of the Karzai government or the Afghan people in any meaningful way thus far, as the Administration asserted it would.

The Karzai Government

As Stephen Biddle of the Council on Foreign Relations explains, "Local partners are almost never adequate at the outset – this is why they face insurgencies in the first place. If the local leadership were effective already, there would be no insurgency to fight. Almost by definition, counterinsurgency implies a problematic host government. The real issue is not whether Karzai is an adequate partner but, rather, how to make his government into one. The answer is to change its incentives."¹ The Obama Administration argues that a withdrawal timeline can play an integral role in helping to change its incentives for the better. Conversely, I posit that it is likely to produce perverse incentives that encourage the Karzai government to continue, or even step up, behaviors that run contrary to US COIN objectives.

As former US special envoy to Afghanistan in 2001 and 2002, James Dobbins, opines, "If everyone thinks the United States is heading for the exits...why should they pay large costs and take

¹ Stephen Biddle, "How to Manage Karzai," *Washington Post*, Op-ed, 10 May 2010, http://www.cfr.org/publication/22087/how_to_manage_karzai.html.

large risks now?”² With the beginning of the withdrawal process looming in a few short months, the Karzai government must prepare for an uncertain future – after all, ambiguity is, as discussed, a core characteristic of the timeline. To begin with, the Karzai government is no stranger to insufficient US commitment (2001-2008) and it witnessed the impact first-hand: with too few international forces throughout the early to mid-2000s, the Taliban began to emerge in large numbers from their safe havens in Pakistan and mount aggressive operations with increased frequency. The insurgency’s momentum continued throughout the late 2000s (arguably to this day); yet, Karzai’s international partners continually failed to dedicate the necessary manpower and resources to forestall it – the government languished and the insurgency expanded. While many Westerners continually proclaim Karzai to be an “unreliable partner,” they should appreciate that, for the better part of eight years, the West was also fairly unreliable. Keeping this history in mind, the timeline appears likely to incentivize the Karzai government to hedge against another era of insufficient US commitment. If the American mission will only contract after July 2011, as the Administration claims, it produces the incentive for the Karzai government to focus on preparing itself for the existential threat posed by another Taliban resurgence, similar to what was seen in the mid-to-late 2000s, instead of focusing on the difficult and time-consuming tasks of extending better governance. If survival is a core interest of the Karzai government, it would be negligent not to “hunker down” to prepare for a future in which sufficient levels of US commitment are in doubt.

Advocates of the timeline would argue that the Karzai government’s best chance for survival is to make the necessary reforms and to accelerate progress. Because the timeline makes its future uncertain, they argue, it will incentivize the government to get moving on better governance. However, the evidence suggests that many within the Karzai Administration, including Karzai himself, believe that sufficient progress cannot possibly be made by the time the US mission is set to contract in July 2011 – and after July 2011, it is anybody’s guess as to the level of US commitment. For example, in July 2010, Afghan Ambassador to the US, Said Tayeb Jawad, told *CNN* that the July

² James Dobbins, “The Afghanistan Clock,” *ForeignPolicy.com*, 24 June 2010, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/24/the_afghanistan_clock.

2011 deadline was both unrealistic and unhelpful, stating: “If you over-emphasize a deadline that is not realistic, you are making the enemy a lot bolder. You are prolonging the war. That deadline should be realistic. The line should be based on the reality on the ground and we should give a clear message to the enemy, to the terrorists who are a threat to everyone, that the United States, NATO, Afghans are there to finish this job. If that's not the feeling, we lost the support of the Afghan people, and also make the neighboring countries of interest a lot bolder to interfere in Afghanistan.”³ Additionally, Karzai himself has expressed doubt about whether July 2011 is a realistic date to begin withdrawing US troops. In an interview with *CNN*'s Christine Amanpour on December 6, 2009, Karzai urged caution with the July 2011 date, stating: “We will try our best as the Afghan people to do it the soonest possible. But the international community must have also the patience with us and the realization of the realities in Afghanistan. If it takes longer, then they must be with us.”⁴ On December 8, 2009, Karzai offered his own assessment as to the length of time US forces will need to stay in Afghanistan, telling Secretary Gates that it could be five years before his army is ready to take on the insurgents and that it could take at least fifteen years before the Afghan government could fund security forces strong enough to protect the country from the threat of an insurgency.⁵ In August 2010, Karzai, demonstrating his frustration with the timeline, loudly criticized the July 2011 date, saying that it “has given courage to the enemies of Afghanistan.”⁶ Reading between the lines, one certainly gets a sense that Karzai is seriously concerned about the timeline's realism and effects, and America's overall commitment to Afghanistan. Given the history of America's erratic involvement in the region, it is easy to understand his concerns.

³ Ambassador Said Tayeb Jawad quoted in interview with Candy Crowley on “State of the Union,” *CNN*, 4 July 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/07/04/afghanistan.withdrawal.deadline/?hpt=T1>.

⁴ President Hamid Karzai quoted in interview with Christine Amanpour on “Amanpour,” *CNN*, 6 December 2009, http://articles.cnn.com/2009-12-06/world/us.afghanistan.karzai_1_afghan-president-hamid-karzai-training-afghan-security-forces-afghanistan?_s=PM:WORLD.

⁵ Anne Flaherty, “Afghan Leader: Help Needed to Pay for Larger Army,” Associated Press, *The Seattle Times*, 8 December 2009, http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/nationworld/2010451116_apasgatesafghanistan.html

⁶ President Hamid Karzai quoted in Joshua Partlow, “Karzai Criticizes US Timeline for Leaving Afghanistan,” *Washington Post*, 26 August 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/26/AR2010082603882.html>.

Consequently, if sufficient progress prior to July 2011 is perceived as unlikely by top officials in the Afghan government, and if the level of US commitment after July 2011 is in question, then the incentive created by the timeline is for the Karzai government – if it is at all interested in survival – to begin planning for an existence without adequate US help. In contrast with US COIN objectives, this incentive does not lend itself toward better governance. US-desired political reforms, such as strengthening local institutions and re-igniting developmental projects, would take years to come to fruition, if implemented today. With July 2011 looming, though, the Karzai government is likely incentivized to steer clear of such a long-term approach, even though it is what US COIN doctrine prescribes. Long-term reforms aimed at better governance, if implemented today, may not help Karzai if the US begins to leave in large numbers after July 2011. Instead, the timeline likely sends a message to the Karzai government that it should take a shorter-term approach, primarily focused on navigating the uncertain months ahead – in other words, surviving a potentially large US withdrawal.

First and foremost, the Obama Administration wants to see Karzai abandon his monopolization of power and work more aggressively to strengthen local institutions. Today's Afghanistan is a highly centralized presidential system – the original idea was to create a strong, clearly identifiable Afghan leader who could rein in regional warlords and prevent fragmentation. For instance, Karzai holds the constitutional power to unilaterally adopt emergency legislation, on matters other than budgeting and finance, when Parliament is in recess. What is even more striking is Karzai's enormous power of appointment: he appoints all national ministry heads, the attorney general, members of the supreme court, provincial police chiefs, and the head of the national bank, though they must all be confirmed by both houses of Parliament. Furthermore, Karzai appoints one-third of the upper house of Parliament, provincial and district governors, and the mayor of Kabul, along with various other offices. In all, he controls over 1,000 direct appointments and many other indirectly controlled positions, without parliamentary oversight.⁷ Since the beginning, Karzai has taken advantage of this centralization of the state, particularly his ability to put so many people in

⁷ Colin Cookman and Caroline Wadhams, "Governance in Afghanistan: Looking Ahead to What We Leave Behind," pp. 6-7.

various high-level posts throughout government. Through his powers of patronage and resource distribution, Karzai frequently aims to co-opt the regional and local power brokers (i.e., warlords) that he deems as most important to keep his competition at bay.⁸ Unfortunately, this highly centralized system runs contrary to traditional Pashtun expectations that local communities should have a major voice in the decision-making process. The present power imbalance contributes to the general alienation that many Afghans feel, especially the Pashtuns.⁹

On paper, the Karzai government seems amenable to making reforms. Its current sub-national governance policy, in fact, calls for the establishment of village councils by March 2012, which would possess wide powers of development planning and execution and be aimed at impacting rural communities that the government currently does not reach.¹⁰ Yet, when it comes to de-centralization, the timeline seems unlikely to incentivize a change of behavior. Because the timeline throws the level of US commitment into question after July 2011, it most likely creates the natural motivation for Karzai to maintain a firm grip on power, especially to protect his administration, as much as possible, against an uncertain future and a potential Taliban resurgence. One likely incentive created by the timeline, then, would be to retain his centralized control, or possibly even try to amass further power, and to resist de-centralization efforts which reduce his overall authority, even though de-centralization efforts are what the US seeks. It probably would have been easier to convince Karzai to cede his power if the US assured him of unwavering assistance as he navigated through the potentially risky reforms. By the same token, it is probably more difficult now to convince Karzai to cede his power because the withdrawal timeline opens up an ambiguous future in which US commitment may be insufficient and, thus, his position at the top could be seriously threatened by competitors.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 6-7.

⁹ Fred Kagan and Kim Kagan, "Defining Success in Afghanistan," *Institute for the Study of War* and the *American Enterprise Institute*, 7 January 2011, <http://www.understandingwar.org/files/DefiningSuccessinAfghanistanElectronicVersion.pdf>.

¹⁰ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Sub-national Governance Policy: Executive Summary," pp. 14-15.

Timeline advocates would argue that the Bush Administration, for eight years, pledged unwavering support for Karzai, and he still failed to institute the necessary de-centralization reforms – the only option, now, is a “tough love” strategy that severs the continual dependence. I would argue, however, that the assistance offered by the Bush Administration throughout the 2000s was never sufficient enough to hold back the growing insurgency anyway, which probably helps to explain why Karzai never ceded his powers. Now, for the first time, the US has sufficient personnel and resources on the ground in Afghanistan to, at least, stall the Taliban’s advances in key areas, if not reverse them altogether. In fact, recent evidence suggests that, beginning in late 2010 and continuing into early 2011, Coalition forces have been making significant gains in southern Afghanistan, particularly in Kandahar and Helmand Province.¹¹ According to a January 2011 study, “the momentum of the insurgency in the south has unquestionably been arrested and probably reversed.” Since the deployment of additional troops to southern Afghanistan, according to the study’s authors, Fred and Kim Kagan, both military historians and prominent advisors to top military commanders, the Taliban has lost almost all of its key safe havens in the area due to Coalition clearing operations; its ability to acquire, move, and use weaponry and equipment has been seriously disrupted; its assassination squads have been largely dismantled; and local populations have, with the help of ISAF, formed local defense initiatives against the Taliban for the first time in several key areas.¹² Many media outlets and top military commanders, such as General Petraeus, have made similar claims and, in its December 2010 Afghan Strategy Review, the Obama Administration echoed the view that serious progress is being made in southern Afghanistan, largely due to the influx of additional troops.¹³ However, as the Kagans point out, while the security momentum in southern

¹¹ Carlotta Gall, “Coalition Routs Taliban in Southern Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, 20 October 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/21/world/asia/21kandahar.html>; “Overview of the Afghanistan and Pakistan Annual Review,” *The White House*, December 2010, http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/pdf/12.15.10_APAR_Overview_Final.pdf?hpid=topnews; Deb Riechmann, “Afghan, NATO Forces Brace for Spring Offensive Against Taliban,” Associated Press, *Washington Post*, 7 February 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/07/AR2011020703651.html>.

¹² Fred Kagan and Kim Kagan, “Defining Success in Afghanistan.”

¹³ “Overview of the Afghanistan and Pakistan Annual Review,” *The White House*, December 2010.

Afghanistan has improved in favor of Coalition forces, it is important to note that political progress from the Afghan government in this area has been much more limited.¹⁴

Still, for the first time, America's level of commitment may be sufficient enough to convince Karzai that the Taliban's momentum is halting, thus making him feel more comfortable to give up some of his power. Of course, these operational gains are fragile and reversible. Nevertheless, the US can finally make a serious argument that the Taliban's momentum is being stalled, if not reversed, in its beloved southern heartland, which would help provide breathing space for Karzai to institute some of the de-centralization reforms that Afghanistan so badly needs – after all, strong, representative local institutions are a foundation of Pashtun tribal culture. The timeline, though, raises the possibility that this level of US commitment will be short-lived, which, consequently, raises the possibility that these recent gains will be short-lived, as well – and this engenders an incentive for Karzai to maintain his firm grip on power vis-à-vis local governing bodies.

Similarly, the timeline likely incentivizes Karzai to maintain his considerable powers of patronage and resource distribution, which enable him to co-opt regional and local power brokers, in an effort to keep his competition at bay. After all, he may need to rely heavily on these co-opting powers in the uncertain days ahead. On a comparable note, the timeline likely incentivizes him to continue his disinclination to prosecute corrupt officials who are deemed political allies, in the interest of maintaining a core political coalition in an unsure future. Karzai has survived for nearly a decade in Afghanistan partly because of his shrewd ability to cut deals with warlords, his over-centralization of power, and his toleration of corrupt officials who served as political allies. The timeline, I argue, will probably incentivize him to continue, if not step up, these survival tactics.

Equally consequential, the timeline may incentivize the Karzai government to begin preparing for some sort of power-sharing arrangement with the insurgency, even though the insurgency's nationwide momentum has yet to be extensively reversed. As it stands today, Karzai enjoys a level of US commitment that will only wane after July 2011. Therefore, the likely incentive

¹⁴ Fred Kagan and Kim Kagan, "Defining Success in Afghanistan."

would be to negotiate with the insurgency *now*, while he still enjoys maximum support from his major international partner. Generally speaking, actors seek to engage in negotiations when they are at their strongest, and if July 2011 heralds a sizeable withdrawal of American troops, Karzai's leverage at the bargaining table would, in all likelihood, seriously decline. Not surprisingly, since the announcement of the July 2011 date, Karzai's efforts to persuade the Taliban to join his government have intensified and, for the most part, the Obama Administration has expressed cautious support in exploring the possibility of such talks.¹⁵ As Karzai remarked in a February 2011 speech in Munich, he would like to reconcile insurgents "as soon as possible."¹⁶ Former Afghan spy chief, Amrullah Saleh, asserted: "He [Karzai] thinks he's protecting himself by trying to talk to the Taliban..."¹⁷ While the US COIN strategy recognizes and acknowledges that negotiations and political reconciliation are ultimately an essential piece of the final puzzle, most experts would agree that the insurgency, at the current time, is not prepared to agree to the types of conditions that would prove acceptable to the US. Still, the Obama Administration thinks it is worth a shot, though expectations are fairly low. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said about the possibility, "stranger things have happened in the history of war."¹⁸

Realistically, though, the Administration knows it cannot base a war strategy on such wishful thinking. US COIN doctrine calls for political reconciliation once the insurgents' momentum has been critically reversed and they no longer believe that success is likely. From this position of weakness, according to COIN doctrine, former insurgents would be forced to reconcile and integrate into the existing order of the state. But at the present time, the insurgency, by and large, believes that winning is still possible, if not likely, and thus is unlikely to accept reconciliation and integration with

¹⁵ Helene Cooper and Thom Shanker, "Gates Says US Seeks Opportunities in Talks with Taliban," *New York Times*, 14 October 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/15/world/asia/15nato.html>.

¹⁶ President Hamid Karzai quoted in Michael Bimbaum, "Karzai Critical of Aid Bypassing Afghan Government," *Washington Post*, 6 February 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/06/AR2011020601205.html>.

¹⁷ Amrullah Saleh quoted in Yaroslav Trofimov, "Karzai Divides Afghanistan in Reaching Out to Taliban," *Wall Street Journal*, 10 September 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703720004575476913015061570.html>.

¹⁸ Secretary of State Hillary Clinton quoted in Helene Cooper and Thom Shanker, "Gates Says US Seeks Opportunities in Talks with Taliban."

the current structure of the Karzai government. As C.I.A. Director Leon Panetta acknowledged in late October 2010, “I still have not seen anything that indicates that at this point a serious effort is being made to reconcile [by the insurgency].”¹⁹ Not surprisingly, as late as February 2011, there has been little concrete progress toward reconciliation.²⁰ Dexter Filkins of the *New York Times* puts it well: “Perhaps the biggest complication lies on the battlefield. As long as the Taliban believe they are winning, they do not seem likely to want to make a deal.”²¹ Even if the insurgency does sit down at the bargaining table, it is unlikely to accept anything short of major political accommodation (i.e., an equity stake in Afghanistan’s future government) or perhaps even total control – both of which would be unacceptable to the US.

While the Obama Administration has demonstrated cautious openness to exploring the possibility of talks, a potentially serious problem arises for the US should the Karzai government unilaterally begin to offer large, premature carrots to the insurgency, especially carrots in the form of major political accommodation or power-sharing arrangements. With the July 2011 deadline looming and its future power in question, the Karzai government may be willing to tolerate a level of co-existence with the Taliban that goes significantly beyond what the US would be willing to accept. According to COIN doctrine, a political settlement – at the current time – should be avoided because it is likely to produce outcomes that would prove unacceptable for US national security; however, the withdrawal timeline likely incentivizes the Karzai government to do just that – negotiate now, while the US is still at its maximum commitment. Not only could premature negotiations lead to a precarious dilemma for the US, but it could also produce sectarian conflict within Afghanistan itself – in fact, major capitulation in favor of the predominantly Pashtun insurgency would likely infuriate

¹⁹ C.I.A. Director Leon Panetta quoted in Dexter Filkins, “Taliban Elite, Aided by NATO, Join Talks for Afghan Peace,” *New York Times*, 19 October 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/20/world/asia/20afghan.html>.

²⁰ Rod Nordland, “Karzai Calls on the US to Free a Taliban Official,” *New York Times*, 8 February 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/09/world/asia/09afghan.html>.

²¹ Dexter Filkins, “Taliban Elite, Aided by NATO, Join Talks for Afghan Peace.”

the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras in northern and central Afghanistan, who have long-opposed a return to Taliban dominance.²²

Granted, the November 2010 announcement of the end-of-2014 deadline for the final transition to Afghan security forces probably helped to mitigate some concerns about an absolute US withdrawal after July 2011. Moreover, it is by no means certain that the US will leave in large numbers after July 2011. In fact, the US may end up withdrawing only a small number of troops, as some within the defense establishment have hinted. At the same time, though, according to a March 2011 Washington Post/ABC News poll, nearly two-thirds of Americans say the Afghan war is not worth fighting and 73% think that a “substantial number” of combat forces should be withdrawn from Afghanistan in the summer of 2011,²³ which places a powerful domestic political constraint on the Obama Administration’s policy options – a constraint of which the Karzai government (and the Taliban) is certainly aware. To date, the Obama Administration has provided little clarity and the big question still remains: How fully resourced will the COIN effort be after July 2011? The fact that the timeline creates such ambiguity throws this all into question – and that is the core problem. Its inherent haziness, in my view, is likely to incentivize the Karzai government to focus on hedging bets in a vague future, instead of focusing on the types of long-term governance reforms that the COIN strategy seeks to promote. As one senior Karzai aide told the *Wall Street Journal*, Karzai feels the need to hedge because “he must prepare for the worst-case scenario,” which, the aide explained, would be a premature withdrawal of Coalition forces, leaving the Karzai government at the mercy of unreliable allies and security forces.²⁴

The currently available evidence since December 2009, when Obama initially announced the July 2011 date, indicates that the Karzai government has not made significant reforms or accelerated progress in key areas, as the Obama Administration claimed it would. Of course, the extent to which the timeline is actually influencing the Karzai government’s behavior is not precisely determinable

²² Yaroslav Trofimov, “Karzai Divides Afghanistan in Reaching Out to Taliban.”

²³ Washington Post/ABC News Poll of the American People, 10-13 March 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/postpoll_03142011.html.

²⁴ Yaroslav Trofimov, “Karzai Divides Afghanistan in Reaching Out to Taliban.”

and, of course, a myriad of other variables are in play; still, it appears that the Administration's claims are not coming to fruition. As of November 2010, for example, the Karzai government had still failed to fill most government jobs in Kandahar, a task that has been a top NATO priority for years. According to Joshua Partlow and Karen DeYoung at the *Washington Post*, "the United States and its NATO allies have tried to build a Kandahar administration that can address residents' grievances and sway them from the Taliban. The US has also embarked on a massive spending spree in order to prop up Kandahar authorities and provide basic services. But with power monopolized by the central government in Kabul, the provincial and municipal offices in southern Afghanistan's largest city are hamstrung and undermanned."²⁵ To date, there is little indication that the Karzai government is prepared to implement a serious sub-national governance plan that cedes decision-making power from Kabul. Take, for instance, Karzai's February 2011 speech in Munich, where he criticized some Western aid efforts to bolster local governments because he believed they were undermining his government in Kabul. Aid not directly routed through Kabul, whether it be from Coalition forces or private NGOs, he said, is an impediment to growth. "The Afghan people get confused," Karzai asserted, because "they don't know who the authority is."²⁶ In the same speech, he also called for the elimination of ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), units which have played an important role in strengthening local governments for nearly eight years and remains a cornerstone of US COIN strategy today.²⁷

Moreover, there is little indication that Karzai is serious about re-igniting developmental projects – in fact, his recent efforts to expel private security companies threatens to eliminate or stall billions in vital developmental projects across Afghanistan.²⁸ What is more, Karzai and the newly-

²⁵ Joshua Partlow and Karen DeYoung, "Afghan Government Falls Short in Kandahar," *Washington Post*, 2 November 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/02/AR2010110206269.html>.

²⁶ President Hamid Karzai quoted in Michael Bimbaum, "Karzai Critical of Aid Bypassing Afghan Government."

²⁷ Ibid.; Carter Malkasian and Gerald Meyerle, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How Do We Know They Work?," Strategic Studies Institute, *US Army War College*, 25 March 2009, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubid=911>.

²⁸ Deb Riechmann, "Clinton Asks Karzai to Modify His Ban," Associated Press, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 October 2010, http://www.philly.com/philly/news/nation_world/20101024_Clinton_asks_Karzai_to_modify_his_ban.html.

elected Parliament show little sign of getting serious about developing a more cooperative working relationship with each other. On January 19, 2011, Karzai announced that he would delay Parliament's inauguration while a special court he established could finish investigating allegations of fraud by certain unsuccessful candidates. Many of these candidates, perhaps not surprisingly, were from Karzai's political base in the Pashtun south. The successful candidates and Karzai's opponents, along with a host of Afghan and Western officials, accused Karzai of attempting to engineer a more favorable electoral outcome for himself. The next day, 213 of the 249 elected Parliament members gathered in defiance, expressing their desire to open the new session on time. One member, the interim secretary of the Parliament, Naheed Farid, went so far as to say: "Maybe we'll start in the street if we have to."²⁹ Though it has since been resolved, the standoff, alone, raised the possibility of a constitutional crisis and violent protests and demonstrated the continuing ethnic fissures within the government. Perhaps more consequentially, it also raised serious doubts about Karzai's ability and desire to work cooperatively with the Parliament to institute meaningful reforms in 2011.

Not only has the Karzai Administration continually failed to de-centralize, re-ignite developmental projects, and develop more constructive relations with Parliament, it has also continually stalled on corruption prosecutions. For example, in July 2010, the head of administration for Karzai's National Security Council, Mohammed Zia Salehi, was arrested for soliciting a bribe. Much to the dismay of his international partners, Karzai himself intervened in the case and won Salehi's release. Seven weeks later, in mid-September 2010, the *New York Times* revealed that there had been no new corruption prosecutions since Salehi's arrest. At the direction of the Afghan government, new corruption inquiries had been frozen, once again demonstrating an inadequate

²⁹ Naheed Farid quoted in Ray Rivera, "Defiant Legislators Vow to Open Afghan Parliament," *New York Times*, 20 January 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/21/world/asia/21afghan.html?ref=world>.

commitment to tackling the pervasive corruption extant in Karzai's administration.³⁰ By November 2010, the Afghan government dropped all charges against Salehi.³¹

In the final analysis, the Obama Administration's claims when it sold the withdrawal timeline do not appear to have come to fruition, nor does it appear likely that they will in the near future. There is little current evidence to suggest that the timeline built a "fire" under the Karzai government. Its behavioral trajectory over the past several years, marked by foot-dragging, co-opting, over-centralization, hedging bets, and corruption, remains remarkably consistent today. These behaviors, though harmful to America's COIN effort, helped Karzai survive nearly a decade as leader of one of the world's most shattered, tumultuous countries, all without adequate international assistance. Because the withdrawal timeline opens up the possibility of another era of insufficient US commitment, it creates an incentive for the Karzai government to continue, or perhaps even step up, these tried-and-true survival tactics, even if they are damaging to US COIN objectives.

If the Karzai government does not change its behaviors, it is unlikely that America will reach anywhere near a successful conclusion in Afghanistan – even the greatest of tactical battlefield successes by the US military cannot make up for the strategic shortcomings of the Karzai government. After all, according to COIN theory, a reliable host government is a prerequisite for success. Some have argued that the announced withdrawal deadlines encourage the Taliban to "lay low" until the deadlines pass, and to resurface once US troops have left. Unfortunately, the Taliban are not this foolish and the Karzai government will not be so lucky. If the insurgency begins to "lay low," it would give the government the necessary time and space to build its capacity, extend its governance, and win over more Afghans in the process. By the time the insurgents would theoretically resurface, the government may have already won the battle of legitimacy. There is little to suggest that the Taliban would make such a fatal mistake, particularly when it believes that the

³⁰ Rod Nordland and Alissa Rubin, "New Afghan Corruption Inquiries Frozen," *New York Times*, 14 September 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/15/world/asia/15afghan.html?ref=world>.

³¹ Joshua Partlow and Javed Hamdard, "Afghan Investigators Decry Dropped Charges in Karzai Aide's Corruption Case," *Washington Post*, 9 November 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/09/AR2010110904659.html>.

momentum is on its side. If anything, the fast-approaching withdrawal deadlines probably encourage the Taliban to continue to apply pressure on the government and Coalition forces. As Afghan officials have publicly stated, the timeline likely “invigorates” the insurgency.³² The Obama Administration, if it is to achieve its goals in Afghanistan, must implement policies that help change the decision calculus of the Karzai government for the better, amidst continuing Taliban pressure. Unfortunately, it appears that the timeline policy has not, so far, and will probably not do so in the future. If the Karzai government ultimately ends up acting in harmony with US COIN objectives, it will likely be attributable to factors other than the withdrawal timeline.

The Afghan People

To be sure, most Afghans do not view the Taliban favorably. In a November 2010 ABC/BBC News/Washington Post poll, only 10% of Afghans said that they had a very favorable or somewhat favorable view of the Taliban – the rest had somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable views.³³ These conclusions have been reported in various polls taken by various organizations and have remained relatively constant over the years. For example, according to a 2006 World Public Opinion poll, 88% of Afghans said they had an unfavorable view of the Taliban.³⁴ Nor does it seem that Afghans have any desire to revisit the days when the Taliban ran the government. In the same November 2010 ABC/BBC News/Washington Post poll, Afghans were asked: “Who would you rather have ruling Afghanistan today?” Only 9% of Afghans said the Taliban, while 86% said the current government.³⁵ The Afghans who are most likely to support the Taliban and least likely to support the Karzai government are from Pashtun tribes along the eastern border and in the southern heartland. In fact, the Taliban is mainly a rural insurgency that grew out of Pashtun tribes and currently finds its greatest level of strength and support in Pashtun-dominated lands. Not

³² Hamid Shalizi, “Afghans Say Withdrawal Timeline ‘Invigorates’ Taliban,” *Reuters*, 25 August 2010, <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFTRE67O2SS20100825?sp=true>.

³³ ABC/BBC News/Washington Post Poll of the Afghan People, *Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research in Kabul*, November 2010, p. 25, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/06_12_10_afghanpoll.pdf.

³⁴ World Public Opinion Poll, “Afghan Public Overwhelmingly Rejects al-Qaeda, Taliban,” *Program on International Policy Attitudes*, January 2006, <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brasiapacificra/155.php?nid=&id=&pnt=155&lb=bras>.

³⁵ ABC/BBC News/Washington Post Poll of the Afghan People, November 2010, p. 9.

surprisingly, nearly all of Obama's 30,000 surge troops deployed to priority areas where Pashtun tribes dominate the population. Of course, one can find some support for the Taliban in all ethnic groups across Afghanistan; however, the problem is most acute in Pashtun lands.³⁶

Regardless of ethnicity, the fact remains that a noteworthy minority of Afghan people still support the Taliban, and in COIN, even a small level of public support for an insurgency should be of considerable concern to the counterinsurgent, especially when the host government is as weak as the Karzai government. As the US Army COIN Field Manual reminds us, because it is relatively easy to sow disorder (especially in a place like Afghanistan), even a small percentage of public support may be all that is necessary for an insurgency to seize power. The host government, on the other hand, if it hopes to ensure the status quo, does not enjoy that luxury. The debate germane to this essay is: Is the timeline likely to produce the "right" incentives for more Afghans, or is it more likely to produce perverse incentives?

Through a brief historical overview, we will discover that Afghans behave relatively predictably in war, and that these consistent historical predictors will assist in addressing the timeline question. Of course, the Afghan people are certainly no strangers to war. The country's strategic location, wedged between Persia, Central Asia, and the ancient trade routes of the Indian Subcontinent, has made it extremely attractive to great power conquerors. From Alexander the Great (330 BC) to the Islamic conquest (652 AD) to Genghis Khan (1221 AD) to the 19th Century British invasions to the Soviet war in the 1980s, Afghans know war all too well. After generations upon generations of war, they have developed a "sixth sense about survival: they can detect subtle shifts in power."³⁷ More specifically, survival in Afghanistan greatly hinges on siding with the eventual winners.

³⁶ According to a June/July 2010 Asia Foundation poll, half of Pashtun respondents (49%) say they have some sympathy with armed opposition groups, compared to Uzbek (36%), Tajik (32%) and Hazara (27%) respondents. "A Survey of the Afghan People," *Asia Foundation*, June/July 2010, <http://asiafoundation.org/publications/pdf/797>.

³⁷ Tim McGirk, "Behind the Taliban's Resurgence in Afghanistan," *Time*, 16 September 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1923303,00.html#ixzz0xmZ7YT75>.

As M.I.T. professor, Fotini Christia, wrote in a July/August 2009 *Foreign Affairs* article, “After continuing uninterrupted for more than 30 years, war in Afghanistan has developed its own peculiar rules, style, and logic. One of these rules is side with the winner.”³⁸ The history of warfare in Afghanistan is replete with examples of Afghans switching camps mid-conflict because shifts in power have demanded realignment. In wars that drag on for years, switching sides means survival for average Afghans and maintaining power for Afghan commanders. For example, Uzbek General, Rashid Dostum, fought with the Soviets against the mujahedeen throughout the 1980s, but then joined the mujahedeen once it emerged victorious and the Soviets withdrew. In the 1990s civil war, Hazara leader Abdul Mazari fought against Pashtun commander Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, only to join his side years later. In many of these cases, as Christia points out, “battles have often been decided less by fighting than by defections.”³⁹ Even when the US invasion of Afghanistan began in 2001, the allegiances of many Taliban proved malleable, as some previously aligned with al-Qaeda switched and began to participate in consultations with the new government. David Kilcullen, who has extensive ground experience in Afghanistan and Pakistan, illuminates this phenomenon best when he recounts a conversation with a local tribal leader:

“Once, last year, I was with a local leader and eleven of his district elders. This guy had fought with the Taliban and had just defected to the government side a few weeks before, and we were all sitting down and talking about the situation, and I asked him what made him decide to leave the Taliban and join the government. And he said – ‘Oh, you don’t get it. I wasn’t with the Taliban before, and I’m not with the government now. I was always just trying to protect my people, to look after them. Before, I thought we were better off with the Taliban. Now, we think we’re better off with the government – but that could change.’ So this is a classic ‘swing voter’ approach. Other people take a ‘hedging’ approach: in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, I’ve talked to Pashtun leaders from tribes where most families have one son fighting with the Taliban and one with the government, just to cover all bases...people will do almost anything, and support almost anyone, to reduce that feeling of fear and uncertainty...if people know they can be safe by following a certain set of rules, they will flock to the side that provides the most consistent and predictable set of rules. Obviously, people don’t want to be oppressed, and they want to be treated kindly and have a prosperous life. But...these are actually secondary conditions – what people most want is security, through order and predictability...”⁴⁰

³⁸ Fotini Christia and Michael Semple, “Flipping the Taliban,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2009, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65151/fotini-christia-and-michael-semble/flipping-the-taliban>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, pp. 151-152.

Professor Christia sums it up well: “Changing sides, realigning, flipping—whatever one wants to call it—is the Afghan way of war.”⁴¹

Many of the answers to the timeline question are ascertainable by examining the history of war in Afghanistan. In order to have any hope that Afghans will come to disavow the insurgency, whether they are currently supporting the insurgency or staying neutral, perceptions about the balance of power and about the likelihood of winning need to shift in favor of the counterinsurgent. Put another way, those Afghans must believe that a coalition victory is not only possible, but, more importantly, *likely* – likely enough that they will risk switching sides. Moreover, for those Afghans currently sitting on the fence, the eventual winner is currently too much in doubt to risk turning on the Taliban, especially considering the insurgency’s brutal record of seeking revenge on “traitors.”

The good news for America, though, is that many Afghans’ allegiances are malleable, which bodes well for a COIN strategy that seeks to alter behaviors. Most estimates indicate that the majority of Afghans who are currently actively and/or passively supporting the insurgency are not ideologically hell-bent on the Taliban’s cause, but rather are doing it as a way to survive in an unforgiving land. For example, the late Richard Holbrooke, former US special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, estimated that 5% of the Taliban are incorrigible, 25% are unsure of their commitment, and 70% support the insurgency for the money.⁴² While it is good news for the US that Afghans are a flexible people, US policymakers must appreciate that many Afghans will not risk turning on the Taliban until they are convinced that a coalition victory is likely and that they, along with their families, will be sufficiently protected from the Taliban if they flip. Advocates of the timeline would argue that because the threat of withdrawal lingers, Afghans will be faced with a stark choice: either start supporting the Karzai government or risk a future under another cruel Taliban regime. While this hypothesis certainly sounds reasonable, I argue, instead, that the timeline will likely incentivize

⁴¹ Fotini Christia and Michael Semple, “Flipping the Taliban.”

⁴² Vice President Joseph Biden citing Ambassador Richard Holbrooke’s Assessment in “NATO Plots Afghan-Pakistan Strategy,” *CNN*, 10 March 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/03/10/nato.qaeda/index.html>.

many Afghans to straddle the middle ground between those two options – in short, to hedge their bets.

The evidence to date suggests that many Afghans have met the timeline with a great deal of hesitation, confusion, and concern. Of course, not every Afghan will be incentivized similarly by the timeline, and some may not be incentivized at all. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of large empirical data sets which provide insight into the likely behavioral incentives produced by the timeline. There is some extant polling on Afghans' general preferences about when they think international forces should leave the country; unfortunately for this essay, no poll connects the withdrawal timeline with any particular behavioral incentive. However, there are reports directly from the battlefield which indicate that the timeline is having a detrimental impact on many Afghans. As Peter Baker from the *New York Times* reported in late June 2010, despite Administration pledges of an “enduring commitment” to Afghans, the “message has not transmitted to many in the rural reaches of Afghanistan, where American troops regularly encounter Afghans who assume they are all leaving next year.” Baker continues:

“In the village of Abdul Ghayas in Helmand Province last month, for example, a local resident exasperated two Marines when he told them that he was nervous about helping with their plans for a new school out of fear that the Taliban would retaliate after the Americans went home next year. ‘That’s why they won’t work with us,’ Cpl. Lisa Gardner, one of the Marines, told a reporter traveling with the unit. ‘They say you’ll leave in 2011 and the Taliban will chop their heads off. It’s so frustrating.’ Later in the day, Corporal Gardner and the other Marine, Cpl. Diana Amaya, reported the villager’s reaction back at the base. Lance Cpl. Caleb Quessenberry advised them on how to deal with similar comments in the future. ‘Roll it off as, ‘That’s what somebody’s saying,’ he told them. ‘As far as we know, we’re here.’ A senior American intelligence official said the Taliban had effectively used the deadline to their advantage.”⁴³

Others, like Nisar Ahmad, a 37-year old taxi driver in Kabul, say that the timeline is “the worst news ever,” believing that “if the US leaves, everything will go wrong. Just look at [the corruption] in government today. The Taliban will take over, and we will appreciate the time we have right now.”⁴⁴ Haroun Mir, director of the Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies,

⁴³ Peter Baker, “With Shift in Afghanistan, Talk Turns to Exit,” *New York Times*, 28 June 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/29/world/asia/29prexy.html>.

⁴⁴ Nisar Ahmad quoted in Jason Motlagh, “Afghans: Divided Over NATO’s New 2014 Target,” *Time*, 22 November 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2032511,00.html>.

and unsuccessful parliamentary candidate, argues similarly: “This is the biggest fear among Afghan people: that once again Afghanistan will be abandoned...And this is the reason the Taliban have been able to expand their territory in Afghanistan.”⁴⁵ Former Afghan presidential candidate, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, at a National Press Club meeting in Washington DC in late May 2010, echoed this general sentiment. When asked whether the July 2011 date was problematic, he answered: “Yeah, I think the perception which [it] has created” is a problem. While the intent of the July 2011 date was good, he said, the perception created “is very different.”⁴⁶

Additionally, there is little available evidence to suggest that the Afghan people have become considerably more supportive of the Karzai government or considerably less supportive of the Taliban since the timeline’s announcement in December 2009. In fact, the poll numbers since December 2009 remain relatively consistent with the poll numbers before December 2009. For example, according to the November 2010 ABC/BBC News/Washington Post poll, Afghans’ favorability of the Taliban has remained on a consistent trajectory, hovering around 10% since 2005.⁴⁷ Moreover, according to the July 2010 Asia Foundation poll, “levels of confidence with most public institutions have remained basically stable, with only minor fluctuations in recent years.”⁴⁸ Of course, this is probably due to a myriad of various factors; still, there is little to suggest that the timeline has helped alter the behavioral trajectory of more Afghan people, as the Administration asserted it would.

While reports from the battlefield are strongly suggestive, the lack of large empirical data sets still remains a problem. However, we can also use deductive logic based on COIN theory to determine whether more Afghans are likely to be incentivized properly by the timeline. When we examine the theoretical premises and assumptions of contemporary COIN doctrine, we discover that

⁴⁵ Haroun Mir quoted in “Turning the War’s Tide: What Some Afghans Think,” Afghanistan Crossroads, CNN, <http://afghanistan.blogs.cnn.com/2010/09/09/turning-the-wars-tide-what-some-afghans-think/>

⁴⁶ Abdullah Abdullah quoted in Edwin Mora, “Obama’s July 2011 Drawdown Date for Afghanistan Sends Mixed Messages, Former Afghan Presidential Candidate Says,” *CNSNews.com*, 26 May 2010, <http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/66717>.

⁴⁷ ABC/BBC News/Washington Post Poll of the Afghan People, November 2010, p. 25.

⁴⁸ “A Survey of the Afghan People,” *Asia Foundation*, June/July 2010, p. 70

a withdrawal timeline appears to run contrary to the long-term commitment that COIN presupposes, and thus, theoretically, it is likely to incentivize counterproductive behavior for many Afghans.

According to theory and doctrine, the primary focus of the US COIN campaign should be those Afghans who are not truly committed either way – the “fence sitters.” As the US Army COIN Field Manual rightfully points out, “In almost every case, counterinsurgents face a populace containing an active minority supporting the government and an equally small militant faction opposing it. Success requires the government to be accepted as legitimate by most of that uncommitted middle.”⁴⁹ Though it goes without saying, in order to earn acceptance from the “uncommitted middle,” the government must be perceived to be the likely eventual winner. But, as David Kilcullen points out, insurgents possess an inherent and sizeable advantage before the battle even begins, which he dubs the “longevity advantage.” When attempting to sway the local population, the counterinsurgent must be aware that many in the local population are keeping a close eye on the likely post-war power structure – put more simply, the likely eventual winner. As Kilcullen explains:

“An expeditionary force fights at a critical disadvantage because everybody – allies and opponents alike – knows it will leave once the fighting ends, making it by definition an unreliable long-term or post-conflict ally. This gives the insurgency a ‘longevity advantage;’ unlike expeditionary counterinsurgents, they are local and indigenous, they will be present after the war ends, and once again everybody knows this. The insurgents can threaten the local population with lethal consequences for cooperating with the counterinsurgents, and unless an external intervener makes extremely strenuous efforts to establish viable long-term alliances with legitimate indigenous partners – who, like the insurgents, will remain once the war ends – then it is extremely difficult to overcome this inherent insurgent advantage.”⁵⁰

By announcing target withdrawal dates, before the insurgency’s national momentum is reversed (or at least stalled), it is difficult to argue that the Obama Administration has made, in the words of Kilcullen, a “strenuous effort to establish a viable long-term alliance” with the Afghan people. As demonstrated earlier, many Afghans can detect subtle power shifts and arrange their allegiances based on the likely post-war structure. The withdrawal timeline opens up the possibility that the US will not maintain a viable, fully resourced, long-term alliance. Without a viable partner,

⁴⁹ US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24, p. 1-20

⁵⁰ David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, p. 12.

the Afghan people will be left to the devices of an Afghan government and security forces in which they have questionable faith. In fact, according to a 2010 Asia Foundation poll, 58% of Afghans say that the Afghan National Police (ANP) – the organization primarily responsible for securing the population – is unprofessional and poorly trained and 69% say that the ANP needs the support of foreign troops because it cannot operate by itself.⁵¹ Not surprisingly, many Afghans are also fearful that they are not adequately protected from the Taliban. According to the November 2010 ABC/BBC News/Washington Post poll, 52% of Afghans feel somewhat bad or very bad about their security from the Taliban in their local neighborhood or village, and 68% of Afghans say that their security from the Taliban is either getting worse or not improving in their local neighborhood or village.⁵² For these reasons, the timeline likely incentivizes many Afghans to continue hedging bets or, as Kilcullen would say, remain in the “uncommitted middle.” After all, if they decide to turn on the Taliban tomorrow and throw their support behind the Karzai government, as the US would like, there is a chance that, in a matter of months, the US will begin to leave their area and the only thing protecting them from retaliation would be a police force that they believe is unprofessional and needs major foreign assistance to operate even with moderate competency.

The international coalition, with its current troop levels, has a difficult enough time protecting the population from Taliban retribution, which is partly the reason that it is so difficult to get Afghans to trust Coalition forces and to turn against the insurgency. The prospect of a contracting US mission, in a few short months, likely incentivizes many Afghans to feel even wearier of cooperating with Coalition forces. It is, quite simply, a basic survivalist instinct. In this sense, the withdrawal timeline runs contrary to a core theoretical underpinning of population-centric COIN: that counterinsurgents must work strenuously to convince the population of its long-term commitment, in order to overcome the insurgents’ inherent “longevity advantage.” In other words, the US must convince the Afghan populace that it will stay as long as necessary to finish the job and dedicate the necessary resources to leave behind a stable host government that is capable of

⁵¹ “A Survey of the Afghan People,” *Asia Foundation*, June/July 2010, p. 40.

⁵² ABC/BBC News/Washington Post Poll of the Afghan People, November 2010, p. 4, 6.

defending itself and its people – as of now, however, the US has announced that its military will fully transition to Afghan security forces by the end of 2014 and that its resources will cap in July 2011. This policy engenders enormous uncertainty in America’s long-term commitment to the region, and this uncertainty is likely to incentivize many Afghans to avoid taking huge risks in the coming months and to hedge accordingly for an uncertain future.

Additionally, the timeline is likely to evoke and exacerbate unpleasant memories of the previous American abandonment of Afghanistan in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. Of course, Afghans are no stranger to American abandonment, and a sizeable portion are mindful of a repeat, especially those old enough to remember the disaster that ensued after America left the last time. Having repelled the Soviets from Afghanistan and having eventually won the Cold War, the United States saw little further geostrategic value in Afghanistan or the region – it had “become a backwater of US foreign policy.”⁵³ As such, the US Embassy in Kabul closed in January 1989. Secretary of State James Baker ended arms shipments to Afghanistan in January 1992. The CIA lost its legal authority to conduct operations in Afghanistan, effectively handing over its Afghan policy to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. There were few funding efforts to help revive Afghanistan after years of devastating war, little assistance for the five million refugees who sought to return, and virtually no diplomatic pressure to force the mujahedeen to a political compromise. The Clinton Administration had generally lost interest in Afghanistan and “stopped well short of creating a strategic policy toward the region.”⁵⁴

By 1994, the country was nearly completely disintegrated, with warlord fiefdoms ruling vast areas of the countryside. Renowned journalist, Ahmed Rashid, explains: “Warlords seized people’s homes and farms for no reason, raped their daughters, abused and robbed the population, and taxed travelers at will. Instead of refugees returning to Afghanistan, more began to leave the south for Pakistan.”⁵⁵ The country had descended into a violent, ethnic civil war. The US failed to assist

⁵³ Seth Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p. 48.

⁵⁴ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, Viking Press, 2008, p. 15.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

Afghans in achieving the peace after the Soviet war, and the chaos of the civil war throughout the early 1990s provided a window of opportunity for a new force to emerge: the Taliban. Most of the Taliban's members were part-time or full-time religion students at *madrassas* – frustrated young men eager to change the dismal situation. As RAND expert Seth Jones explains, “They saw themselves as the cleansers of a war gone astray and a social and political system that had become derailed. Taliban leaders also sought to overturn an Islamic way of life that had been compromised by corruption and infidelity to the Prophet Muhammad.”⁵⁶ Soon, Taliban forces seized governing power altogether, conquering Kandahar (south) in the winter of 1994, Herat (west) in 1995, Kabul (capital) in 1996, and Konduz (north) in 1998.

The bottom line is that many Afghans alive today remember the horrid chain of events following the Soviet withdrawal. The US stopped its assistance and lost its strategic interest in Afghanistan, and the country descended into a chaotic civil war, which ultimately gave rise to the brutal Taliban regime. The quality of life in Afghanistan plummeted throughout this time period. A stronger US commitment may have mitigated the disastrous effects of this dissolution, particularly in the humanitarian realm – it may have even averted the crisis altogether. Of course, in the end, it is impossible to know what would have happened – the Afghan ship may have sunk regardless of US efforts. Yet, more significantly, the US cannot even seriously claim that it ever attempted to keep the ship afloat or to save the passengers once the ship sank. As Ahmed Rashid points out, this is “something they [the Afghan people] have found very difficult to forgive.”⁵⁷

Top US officials are keenly aware that a fear of abandonment runs deep with many Afghans, which is likely why they consistently make public statements aimed at assuaging such fear. For example, in September 2009, Secretary Gates stated in a broadcast interview that the US had learned its lesson from the Soviet war and would not abandon Afghanistan again, vowing that “both

⁵⁶ Seth Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p. 58.

⁵⁷ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p. 11.

Afghanistan and Pakistan can count on us for the long term.”⁵⁸ However, even General Petraeus, who, as a military officer, is bound to publicly support the President’s policies, acknowledged that the timeline has been a hard sell in Afghanistan. Specifically, in an August 2010 interview, he stated: “It’s not a date when there’s an exodus of U.S. or coalition forces. It’s not when we look for the light switch to turn it off before we head out the door. We’ve been to some pains, frankly, to explain that here in Afghanistan.”⁵⁹ While top US officials frequently assert that the Afghan people should not fear an American abandonment, the mere fact that they have to address this issue, time and time again, suggests the existence of a serious problem.

Surely, many average Afghans are not in tune with the nuances and word-parsing of the withdrawal policy debate in Washington DC and in the American media, but they have noticed that the overall tone in US policy, specifically with regard to the exit strategy, has significantly changed from the days of the Bush Administration. Reporting from Kabul just two days after President Obama’s West Point speech, Carlotta Gall wrote in the *New York Times*: “For Afghans, the change in tone was unmistakable. Unlike Bush-era speeches pledging unending support, President Obama suddenly introduced a timeline and a period of 18 months before the start of a drawdown of troops. The timetable set off alarm here.”⁶⁰ In fact, it is difficult to imagine, given the Bush Administration’s long-standing aversion to timelines, a Bush official pledging the withdrawal of all US troops by a certain date “come hell or high water,” as Vice President Biden did this past December.

Timeline advocates would argue that the change in tone is good, incentivizing more Afghans to support the Karzai government before it is too late. Yet, what the advocates misunderstand is that the timeline does nothing to help the US overcome the inherent “longevity advantage” enjoyed by the Taliban. With the knowledge that US commitment will begin to contract in a few short months,

⁵⁸ Defense Secretary Robert Gates quoted in Ann Tyson, “US Learned its Lesson, Won’t Abandon Afghanistan, Gates Says,” *Washington Post*, 9 September 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/08/AR2009090802802.html>.

⁵⁹ General David Petraeus quoted in Interview with Katie Couric on “CBS Evening News,” *CBS*, 20 August 2010, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/08/20/eveningnews/main6791481.shtml>.

⁶⁰ Carlotta Gall, “Afghans See Sharp Shift in US Tone,” *New York Times*, 3 December 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/04/world/asia/04afghan.html>.

the timeline is likely to incentivize many Afghans, who are naturally compelled by the basic desire to keep themselves and their families safe in an uncertain future, to avoid turning on the Taliban now – because if they turn now, and the US decides to leave in considerable numbers after July 2011, their security from the Taliban rests solely in the hands of frequently ineffectual Afghan police. As Afghan expert at the RAND Corporation, Arturo Munoz, states: Contemporary US COIN doctrine “presupposes a long-term commitment”⁶¹ from the counterinsurgent – not only does it take years to develop trust with locals, but also, without such a commitment from the counterinsurgent, the local populace is considerably less likely to risk turning against a violent insurgency. Top US officials can engage in nuanced discussion about the exact meaning of each particular deadline on America’s Sunday morning talk shows, but the broader signal has already been sent to the Afghan people that, one way or another, the US is looking for a way out of Afghanistan.

In the final analysis, the Obama Administration’s claim that the timeline would incentivize more Afghans to take charge of their future appears to be lacking. To begin with, the very notion of a withdrawal timeline seems to run contrary to the basic tenets of COIN theory. But also, there is little currently available evidence to suggest that the timeline has significantly altered the behavioral trajectory of more Afghans. In short, we do not appear to be seeing in Afghanistan what Colin Kahl described in Anbar, Iraq in 2007 – that is, more Afghans turning on the insurgency in momentous ways. Granted, we will need the benefit of historical hindsight to obtain a fuller picture of the ground happenings with the Afghan people. But as it stands today, both from a theoretical and empirical standpoint, it appears that the Administration’s timeline claims have not come to fruition and they seem unlikely to do so in the future. If more Afghans ultimately end up turning against the insurgency, it will likely be attributable to factors other than the timeline.

⁶¹ Arturo Munoz quoted in Denis Gray, “Analysis: Will Battle for Kandahar Win War?,” Associated Press, *Army Times*, 29 August 2010, <http://www.armytimes.com/news/2010/08/ap-afghanistan-analysis-the-battle-for-kandahar-082910/>

Chapter 4: The 2010 Iraqi Impasse

It is important to note that this is not the first time that advocates of the timeline-as-leverage approach argued that a withdrawal timeline would help foster faster and more sustained political progress. In fact, they made remarkably similar arguments as the Obama Administration rigidly adhered to a withdrawal timeline in Iraq. Though the Iraq and Afghan cases are considerably different in some respects, timeline-as-leverage advocates, in both cases, argued that a firm public withdrawal timeline would help produce the “right” incentives for the country’s leadership to begin making tough compromises and working more urgently toward political progress. Yet, as with the Afghan case, the currently available evidence demonstrates that Iraqi leaders did not do this, even with America’s deadlines looming.

On February 27, 2009, in a speech at Camp Lejeune, President Obama announced the results of his first official Iraq strategy review. First, he decided to honor the withdrawal deadline to which President Bush and Iraqi President Maliki had agreed in the 2008 Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA): all US forces – combat and non-combat – would be withdrawn from all Iraqi territory by the end of 2011. Furthermore, Obama inserted an additional deadline entirely of his own volition: by August 31, 2010, all US combat troops would be out of Iraq (about four months later than his campaign pledge).¹ Like with Afghanistan, timeline advocates argued that it would help produce better results. For example, Colin Kahl, who headed an Iraq working group for the Obama campaign, argued in the June/July 2008 *Foreign Affairs* that “convincing the Iraqi government to make the tough decisions needed for accommodation requires following the same logic that drove the Awakening: using the risk of abandonment to generate a sense of urgency while committing to protecting groups that make tough choices. The Bush administration has thus far failed to generate the leverage such a strategy would produce because it has effectively given the Iraqi government a

¹ President Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on Responsibly Ending the War in Iraq,” Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, 27 February 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-of-President-Barack-Obama-Responsibly-Ending-the-War-in-Iraq/

blank check.”² Similarly, Lawrence Korb at the Center for American Progress asserted that Obama’s deadline would “create momentum for Iraqi political progress. The set deadline will put Iraqi leaders and sectarian actors on notice that they must pursue meaningful reconciliation. Obama’s announcement means that the Iraqis must take on the burden of ensuring the continuation of a peaceful political process.”³ Even President Obama, arguably, hinted toward such an assertion during his Camp Lejeune speech: “The drawdown of our military should send a clear signal that Iraq’s future is now its own responsibility. The long-term success of the Iraqi nation will depend upon decisions made by Iraq’s leaders and the fortitude of the Iraqi people.”⁴

Looking back, it appears that the August 2010 deadline to remove all combat troops from Iraq did not help create momentum for political progress, as the advocates claimed. President Obama’s initial plan to withdraw all combat forces by the end of August 2010 was based on the assumption that a newly elected Iraqi government would be in place at least 60 days after the planned December 2009 parliamentary elections. The newly formed government, it was thought, would need a sizeable US combat troop presence for several months to ensure an orderly transition.⁵ However, the Iraqi government failed to pass a necessary election law, causing the election to be delayed until March 2010. Adding insult to injury, the March elections became marred by a messy and controversial aftermath, which prevented a new government from being formed.⁶ While it became increasingly apparent that the formation of a new coalition government would be seriously delayed, the Obama Administration refused to allow its timeline to slide. As Ben Rhodes, a deputy national security adviser to Obama, stated in late April 2010: “We see no indications now that our planning

² Colin Kahl, “When to Leave Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2008.

³ Lawrence Korb, “The Promised Withdrawal from Iraq,” *Center for American Progress*, 27 February 2009, http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/02/promised_withdrawal.html.

⁴ President Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on Responsibly Ending the War in Iraq.”

⁵ Peter Baker and Rod Nordland, “Obama Sticks to a Deadline in Iraq,” *New York Times*, News Analysis, 27 April 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/28/world/middleeast/28iraq.html>; Peter Baker and Thom Shanker, “Obama’s Iraq Plan Has December Elections as Turning Point for Pullout,” *New York Times*, 25 February 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/26/washington/26troops.html>.

⁶ Leila Fadel, “Maliki, Allawi Consider Deal on Forming New Iraqi Government,” *Washington Post*, 4 October 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/04/AR2010100403202.html>; Peter Baker and Rod Nordland, “Obama Sticks to a Deadline in Iraq.”

needs to be adjusted.”⁷ As late as August 2, 2010, just a few days from the deadline and still without any signs that Iraqi leaders would reach a deal, President Obama said: “As a candidate for president, I pledged to bring the war in Iraq to a responsible end and I made it clear that by August 31, 2010, America’s combat mission in Iraq would end – and that is exactly what we are doing – as promised, on schedule.”⁸

Theoretically, the Administration’s rigid adherence to the August 2010 deadline should have helped convince Iraqis to make the tough choices required for political progress. Yet, the evidence suggests otherwise. After the controversial election, the Iraqi political process became paralyzed by sectarian bickering, as top leaders consistently demonstrated an unwillingness to make important compromises. Throughout the spring and summer months, Iraqi leaders continued their troublesome behavior, with nonstop wrangling along sectarian lines about issues such as the limits of constitutional power, the proper distribution of top ministerial posts, and the appropriate allocation of oil resources. Time and time again, Iraqi leaders failed to come together to build a coalition government. All combat troops left Iraq by August 20, 2010 (ten days early), still with the Iraqi political process in disarray. It was not until November 11, 2010 that top Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish politicians finally reached a power-sharing agreement to form a new coalition government.⁹ For timeline advocates, it would be difficult to aver that the timeline helped create momentum for Iraqi political progress when it took eight months after the election for Iraqi leaders to reach a compromise to end the stalemate. The political impasse was not a quarrel over something slight, such as arguing over specific provisions of an appropriations bill. Rather, it was a stalemate over something that was undoubtedly vital for the future stability of Iraq: the formation of a new coalition government in the wake of terrible sectarian and insurgent violence. In the end, the August 2010

⁷ Ben Rhodes quoted in Peter Baker and Rod Nordland, “Obama Sticks to a Deadline in Iraq.”

⁸ President Obama quoted in Peter Baker, “In Speech on Iraq, Obama Reaffirms Drawdown,” *New York Times*, 2 August 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/03/us/politics/03prexy.html>.

⁹ Suadad al-Salhy and Waleed Ibrahim, “Iraq Breaks Impasse as Maliki to Form Government,” *Reuters*, 11 November 2010, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2010/11/11/uk-iraq-politics-idUKTRE6AA1UH20101111>.

deadline may not have worsened the political situation in Iraq, but one would be hard-pressed to argue that the deadline helped to improve it, as some argued it would.

Of course, the Afghan and Iraq cases are not perfectly comparable. To begin with, each country showcases a diverse range of key actors, each with unique motivations and historical experiences. More than that, the Afghan timeline and the Iraq timeline were issued at very different points in the war effort. By the time President Bush signed the SOFA with Iraq in late 2008, and certainly by the time President Obama inserted his own additional deadline, the war's momentum had clearly reversed in favor of Coalition forces and the Iraqi government. With insurgent and sectarian violence precipitously declining from 2007-2008, and with recent military successes in Maliki's corner, it was clear to everyone – the Coalition, Iraqi leaders, the Iraqi people, and the insurgency – that the Maliki government stood as the likely eventual winner. Judging from COIN theory, a timeline appears to be less detrimental if issued once it is clear to all that the likely eventual winner is the host government – even though the people know foreign forces are leaving soon, they will feel assured because their government looks as if it will be capable of providing security and stability once foreign forces leave. After all, COIN is fought with an eye on the post-war power structure.

The Afghan timeline is a different animal altogether because it was issued while the Taliban insurgency possessed the war's momentum. Even President Obama himself acknowledged that the Taliban possessed the momentum at his West Point speech, stating: "We must reverse the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government."¹⁰ Minutes later, he would introduce the July 2011 date. To this day, the post-war structure of Afghanistan remains in doubt, and it is not entirely clear that the Karzai government is well-positioned as the likely eventual winner; however, the timeline still stands as official US policy. For this reason, in my view, the Afghan timeline will probably end up being more consequential (and more risky) than the Iraq timeline. If the Iraq case is any indication, the Afghan timeline policy seems unlikely to produce what the Obama

¹⁰ President Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan."

Administration claims it will. Furthermore, not only does the Afghan timeline seem unlikely to produce what America wants, but because it was issued at a time when the likely eventual winner was (and still is) unclear, it also seems *likely* to produce what America does *not* want – specifically, an incentive for the Karzai government and the Afghan people to continue hedging bets. Obviously, neither the Afghan case nor the Iraq case is settled history, and we will not know the final tally for many years. While neither case provides a definitive rejection of the hypothesis that withdrawal timelines can help facilitate US COIN objectives, they are both fairly suggestive that they will not.

Chapter 5: Policy Implications

As indicated earlier, the Afghan timeline policy potentially rests on three different logics: 1) a way to get out of a prickly war; 2) a way to sustain domestic and international support; and 3) a way to improve America's COIN strategy by creating a strong incentive for the host government and the local population to take charge of their own affairs. This essay posits that the third logic – which I have dubbed the “timeline hypothesis” – rests on shaky theoretical ground, has not produced the intended results thus far, and seems unlikely to produce, in the future, what the Obama Administration claims it will. However, perhaps the Administration's public promotion of the third logic does not reflect the timeline's true purpose. In other words, it is certainly possible that the Administration's timeline policy actually rests on one of the other logics, which were not publicly advertised and which were not evaluated in this essay. It may well be that withdrawal timelines can serve as a useful policy tool for helping the Administration get out of an unpopular and potentially politically disastrous war. In this sense, it may help prevent Afghanistan from undermining the vast array of domestic and foreign policy aspirations of the Obama Presidency – in short, to prevent Afghanistan from becoming Obama's Vietnam. And it may well be that withdrawal timelines can, by providing a “light at the end of the tunnel,” serve as an effective policy tool for maintaining the support of a war-weary domestic and international audience, which is absolutely necessary in a prolonged campaign. Clearly, these are areas that beg for further research. As for the third logic, though, it seems that timelines are probably not an effective policy tool for changing the behaviors of key regional actors and, in some instances, they may even exacerbate existing problems.

The timeline-as-leverage approach in COIN is an interesting academic hypothesis advanced by bright and experienced people. But in Afghanistan, the currently available evidence suggests that the timeline is not producing the results the Obama Administration claimed it would and it also seems unlikely to do so in the near future. Also, the withdrawal timeline hypothesis appears to be incongruous with the basic theory of population-centric COIN, which probably helps explain why it

is not working as the Administration alleged it would. Furthermore, upon closer examination, the evidence that timeline advocates cite in support of their hypothesis – specifically, the Anbar Awakening in Iraq – remains dubious. As discussed earlier, timeline advocates, such as Colin Kahl and even Candidate Obama, claimed that the Anbar Awakening could be largely attributed to the increasing pro-withdrawal sentiment in the US, highlighted by the Democrats’ victory in the November 2006 mid-term elections. Yet, if Anbari leaders were adeptly in-tune with American politics, as timeline advocates claim, then they would have also been fully aware that President Bush – the ultimate decision-maker regarding US troops and one who had already won his second term in office – was consistently pledging to stay in Iraq until “the job” was done. Moreover, nearly all (25 out of 31) of the Sunni tribes in Anbar actually publicly announced that they would fight against al-Qaeda in September 2006 – two months *before* the mid-term elections.¹ Obviously, the ball was already in motion before the Democratic takeover. Evidence suggests that initial shifts in tribal attitudes had nothing to do with American electoral cycles or domestic politics, but instead were primarily due to some combination of: 1) al-Qaeda’s atrocities against Anbari civilians, and 2) aggressive Coalition clearing operations in Ramadi, beginning in June 2006.² And these initial improvements were sustained by the aggressive US COIN efforts that followed in 2007, commonly referred to as the “surge.”³ Kahl and others may posit that the threat of withdrawal signaled by the Democratic takeover, coupled with the surge, helped facilitate what had already been set in motion, but they cannot claim that it provided the impetus for the initial shift. In Afghanistan, the Obama Administration is still looking for that initial behavioral shift from the Karzai government and the Afghan people, and the timeline does not appear to be helping “build the fire.”

¹ Khalid al-Ansary and Ali Adeeb, “Most Tribes in Anbar Agree to Unite Against Insurgents,” *New York Times*, 18 September 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/18/world/middleeast/18iraq.html>.

² Kim Kagan, *The Surge: A Military History*, Encounter Books, New York, 2009; Peter Wehner, “Obama’s War,” *Commentary Magazine*, April 2008, <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/viewarticle.cfm/re-rethinking-iraq-br---obama-s-war-11263#two>; Dan Senor, “Obama’s Obscene Iraq Fantasy,” *New York Post*, 9 January 2008, http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/item_2u3fK0vRR17UJAjyBWcuoL.

³ Kim Kagan, *The Surge: A Military History*.

Overall, the 2006-2007 Anbar Awakening, upon close examination, does not truly support the hypothesis that the threat of withdrawal can help incentivize initial behavioral shifts – nearly all Sunni tribes in Anbar had already made up their minds *before* the Democratic takeover signaled a threat of withdrawal. Furthermore, the 2010 Iraqi political impasse and the current Afghan situation provide strong support for the argument that withdrawal timelines do not incentivize better behavior from regional actors; in fact, in some instances, they may even incentivize a continuation or acceleration of poor behavior. That being said, none of these cases are settled history and none provide definitive, cause-and-effect confirmation that would allow us to, once and for all, dismiss the potential utility of withdrawal timelines for incentivizing behavior changes. As such, further research should be conducted to determine if, and under what conditions, withdrawal timelines can work to effectively incentivize key actors. Nevertheless, as it stands today, there is a considerable amount of suggestive evidence against the timeline hypothesis, which should make US policymakers deeply skeptical of assertions that timelines can help facilitate COIN objectives.

Of course, not all is lost for the US in Afghanistan. The issuance of a timeline was not a fatal mistake for the COIN effort, for it is just one factor among many. A myriad of variables still exist, which could soon turn in the Coalition's favor, particularly the security momentum in southern Afghanistan, which would certainly heighten the prospects of overall success. The timeline does not doom the war effort to failure, but it probably makes America's COIN objectives more difficult to achieve by incentivizing the host government and the local population to continue, or even step up, its counterproductive behaviors. While it is, in my view, an obstacle, it is something that can be overcome through success in other areas.

Naturally, this provokes the following counterfactual question: Would the Karzai government and the Afghan people have been more likely to cooperate with US COIN objectives if the timeline had never been introduced? I believe so. Having no timeline, obviously, would not have incentivized either actor to do America's bidding, but it would have removed a significant roadblock on the path to success. Suppose, for instance, Coalition forces truly begin to reverse the

security momentum in key parts of Afghanistan in the early summer months. Suppose that, by May and June 2011, the trajectory begins to noticeably shift in favor of the Coalition. Theoretically, this would provide time and space for the Karzai government to begin building its capacity and instituting reforms and, as such, more Afghans would come to support their government, particularly if they are convinced that the Coalition will stay as long as necessary to ensure lasting and durable gains – to make the firm long-term commitment that population-centric COIN demands. Yet, if the possibility exists that the US will soon begin significant drawdowns, the recent gains will seem utterly fragile and reversible to many, causing them to continue hedging bets. COIN is fought with an eye on the long-term post-war outlook – a quick momentum reversal in the coming months would do more if both actors were assured that the improved trajectory would continue over the long haul, rather than just a blip on the radar. Put another way, suppose that each actor possesses an internal “Pros & Cons List” for deciding whether or not it will go along with America’s COIN objectives. The withdrawal timeline, I argue, would fall under the “Cons” list for both actors. And when trying to convince someone to cooperate with your objectives, it is always better to keep their “Cons” list as short as possible. In the end, having no timeline probably would not have led to cooperation, in and of itself, but it probably would have given both actors one less reason to resist US appeals. With this shorter “Cons” list, logically, the Karzai government and the Afghan people would have been more likely to cooperate with US COIN objectives.

Understandably, patience is thin with the conflict in Afghanistan – it is now the longest running war in American history. It is important to realize, though, that for most of the Bush Administration, America pursued a relatively limited counter-terrorism strategy in Afghanistan – in fact, the idea of pursuing a fully resourced COIN strategy in Afghanistan was not endorsed until the later years of the Bush Administration. Even then, the necessary resources were still bogged down in Iraq. As of this past summer, for the first time in nearly a decade, one can make a serious argument

that the US has finally dedicated sufficient resources to fight COIN according to its doctrine.⁴ As Secretary Gates proclaimed, in August 2010, “for the first time in nine years, we now have the resources needed for this fight.”⁵ What is more, contemporary research suggests that population-centric COIN is winnable if the counterinsurgent is willing to stick with it long enough. For example, Andrew Enterline, a professor at the University of North Texas, identified 66 insurgencies fought by foreign powers in the twentieth century. He discovered that switches by foreign powers to a strategy of population-centric COIN (which the US has done in Afghanistan) results in a 75% rate of success, but that the average conflict duration after the switch is almost eight years.⁶ Clearly, employing the multiple military and non-military strategies embedded in population-centric COIN and developing the proper incentives for regional actors takes some time to come to fruition. The Obama Administration has offered up this version of COIN as the most viable and effective war strategy in Afghanistan – and, relatively speaking, it has only just begun. However, a core element of its strategy – the withdrawal timeline – appears to undercut the firm long-term commitment that the strategy demands, which likely incentivizes key regional actors to continue hedging bets.

⁴ Fred Kagan and Kim Kagan, “Afghanistan Force Requirements,” *Institute for the Study of War and the American Enterprise Institute*, 19 September 2009, <http://www.aei.org/docLib/20090921-Kagan-Afghanistan.pdf>.

⁵ Defense Secretary Robert Gates quoted in Greg Jaffe, “As Combat Operations End in Iraq, Gates Hails Shift in Focus to Afghanistan,” *Washington Post*, 31 August 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/31/AR2010083102537.html>.

⁶ Andrew Enterline and Joseph Magagnoli, “Source Research Design and Analysis for Our Feature Article on the Counterinsurgency War in Afghanistan Appearing in *Foreign Policy* Online on August 27, 2009,” University of North Texas, 27 August 2009, <http://www.psci.unt.edu/enterline/aejm-fp-codebook-from-flv12-v3.pdf>.

Bibliography

- “A Survey of the Afghan People.” *Asia Foundation*. June/July 2010. <http://asiafoundation.org/publications/pdf/797>.
- ABC/BBC News/Washington Post Poll of the Afghan People. *Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research in Kabul*. November 2010. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/06_12_10_afghanpoll.pdf.
- Al-Ansary, Khalid and Ali Adeeb. “Most Tribes in Anbar Agree to Unite Against Insurgents.” *New York Times*. 18 September 2006. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/18/world/middleeast/18iraq.html>.
- Al-Salhy, Suadad and Waleed Ibrahim. “Iraq Breaks Impasse as Maliki to Form Government.” *Reuters*. 11 November 2010. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2010/11/11/uk-iraq-politics-idUKTRE6AA1UH20101111>.
- Alter, Jonathan. “Secrets from Inside the Obama War Room.” *Newsweek*. 15 May 2010. <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/05/15/secrets-from-inside-the-obama-war-room.html>.
- Ambassador Said Tayeb Jawad quoted in interview with Candy Crowley on “State of the Union.” *CNN*. 4 July 2010. <http://www.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/07/04/afghanistan.withdrawal.deadline/?hpt=T1>.
- Baker, Peter. “In Speech on Iraq, Obama Reaffirms Drawdown.” *New York Times*. 2 August 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/03/us/politics/03prexy.html>.
- Baker, Peter. “With Shift in Afghanistan, Talk Turns to Exit.” *New York Times*. 28 June 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/29/world/asia/29prexy.html?_r=1.
- Baker, Peter and Rod Nordland. “Obama Sticks to a Deadline in Iraq.” *New York Times*, News Analysis. 27 April 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/28/world/middleeast/28iraq.html>.
- Baker, Peter and Thom Shanker. “Obama’s Iraq Plan Has December Elections as Turning Point for Pullout.” *New York Times*. 25 February 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/26/washington/26troops.html>.
- “Barack Obama’s Afghanistan Withdrawal Deadline ‘Overstated’ Says Top British General.” *The Telegraph*. 27 September 2010. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/asia/afghanistan/8027672/Barack-Obamas-Afghanistan-withdrawal-deadline-overstated-says-top-British-general.html>.
- Barfield, Thomas. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Biddle, Stephen. “How to Manage Karzai.” *Washington Post*, Op-ed. 10 May 2010. http://www.cfr.org/publication/22087/how_to_manage_karzai.html.
- Bimbaum, Michael. “Karzai Critical of Aid Bypassing Afghan Government.” *Washington Post*. 6 February 2011. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/06/AR2011020601205.html>.
- Bumiller, Elisabeth. “Gates Visits Afghanistan to Meet with Karzai and NATO Commanders.” *New York Times*. 8 March 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/09/world/asia/09military.html>.
- Carden, Michael. “Mullen: Insurgents More Concerned with Fight than Timeline.” *American Forces Press Service*. 25 August 2010. <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=60594>.

- Carter, Stephen and Kate Clark. "No Shortcut to Stability: Justice, Politics, and Insurgency in Afghanistan." *Chatham House*. December 2010. http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/18074_1210pr_afghanjustice.pdf.
- Chandrasekaran, Rajiv and Scott Wilson. "Administration's Next Big Afghan Battle: How Many Troops to Withdraw." *Washington Post*. 16 December 2010. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/16/AR2010121600042.html?hpid=topnews>.
- Christia, Fotini and Michael Semple. "Flipping the Taliban." *Foreign Affairs*. July/August 2009. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65151/fotini-christia-and-michael-semble/flipping-the-taliban>.
- Contemporary Insurgent Warfare Course (CIWC). USAF Special Operations School. Personally attended in summer 2009. Hurlburt Field AFB, FL.
- Cookman, Colin and Caroline Wadhams. "Governance in Afghanistan: Looking Ahead to What We Leave Behind." *Center for American Progress*. May 2010. <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/05/pdf/afhangovernance.pdf>.
- Cooper, Helene and Mark Landler. "US Now Trying Softer Approach Toward Karzai." *New York Times*. 9 April 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/10/world/asia/10prexy.html>.
- Cooper, Helene and Thom Shanker. "Gates Says US Seeks Opportunities in Talks with Taliban." *New York Times*. 14 October 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/15/world/asia/15nato.html>.
- Crews, Robert, ed. *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*. Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Defense Secretary Robert Gates quoted in interview with Christine Amanpour on "This Week." *CNN*. 1 August 2010. See transcript at *Real Clear Politics*: http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2010/08/01/interviews_with_speaker_pelosi__secretary_gates_on_this_week_106578.html.
- Dobbins, James. "The Afghanistan Clock." *ForeignPolicy.com*. 24 June 2010. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/24/the_afghanistan_clock.
- Enterline, Andrew and Joseph Magagnoli. "Source Research Design and Analysis for Our Feature Article on the Counterinsurgency War in Afghanistan Appearing in *Foreign Policy* Online on August 27, 2009." University of North Texas. 27 August 2009. <http://www.psci.unt.edu/enterline/aejm-fp-codebook-from-flv12-v3.pdf>.
- Ewans, Martin. *Afghanistan: A Short History of its People and Politics*. Harper Perennial, 2002.
- Fadel, Leila. "Maliki, Allawi Consider Deal on Forming New Iraqi Government." *Washington Post*. 4 October 2010. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/04/AR2010100403202.html>.
- Fall, Bernard. "The Theory and Practice of Counterinsurgency." *Naval War College Review*. April 1965.
- Feaver, Peter. "Anatomy of the Surge." *Commentary Magazine*. April 2008. <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/anatomy-of-the-surge/>
- Filkins, Dexter. "Taliban Elite, Aided by NATO, Join Talks for Afghan Peace." *New York Times*. 19 October 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/20/world/asia/20afghan.html>.
- Filkins, Dexter. "The Taliban Don't Seem Ready to Talk." *New York Times*. 23 January 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/24/weekinreview/24filkins.html>.

- Flaherty, Anne. "Afghan Leader: Help Needed to Pay for Larger Army." Associated Press, *The Seattle Times*. 8 December 2009. http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/nationworld/2010451116_apasgates_afghanistan.html.
- Gall, Carlotta. "Afghans See Sharp Shift in US Tone." *New York Times*. 3 December 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/04/world/asia/04afghan.html>.
- Gall, Carlotta. "Coalition Routs Taliban in Southern Afghanistan." *New York Times*. 20 October 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/21/world/asia/21kandahar.html>.
- Galula, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Praeger Security International, 1964.
- Gannon, James. *Obama's War: Avoiding a Quagmire in Afghanistan*. Potomac Books Inc., 2011.
- Garamone, Jim. "Petraeus Discusses Pros, Cons of July 2011 Deadline." *American Forces Press Service*. 29 June 2010. <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=59837>.
- "Gates: US won't 'be fighting this fight' in Afghanistan Indefinitely." *CNN Wire Staff*. 2 September 2010. <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/09/02/afghanistan.gates/?hpt=T2#fbid=hHbhITOEHec&wom=false>.
- General David Petraeus quoted in interview with David Gregory on "Meet the Press." *NBC*. 15 August 2010. See transcript at *MSNBC.com*: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/38686033/ns/meet_the_press-transcripts.
- General David Petraeus quoted in interview with Katie Couric on "CBS Evening News." *CBS*. 20 August 2010. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/08/20/eveningnews/main6791481.shtml>.
- General David Petraeus' Statements during his Confirmation Hearings before the House Armed Services Committee. 16 June 2010. Washington DC. <http://mediamatters.org/print/research/201006270005>.
- Gray, Denis. "Analysis: Will Battle for Kandahar Win War?" Associated Press, *Army Times*. 29 August 2010. <http://www.armytimes.com/news/2010/08/ap-afghanistan-analysis-the-battle-for-kandahar-082910/>
- Gul, Imtiaz. *The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan's Lawless Frontier*. Viking Adult, 2010.
- Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. "Sub-national Governance Policy: Executive Summary."
- Jaffe, Greg. "As Combat Operations End in Iraq, Gates Hails Shift in Focus to Afghanistan." *Washington Post*. 31 August 2010. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/31/AR2010083102537.html>.
- Jones, Seth. *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*. RAND Counterinsurgency Study, Vol. 4. June 2008. http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG595.pdf.
- Jones, Seth. *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2009.
- Kagan, Kim. *The Surge: A Military History*. Encounter Books, 2009.
- Kagan, Fred and Kim Kagan. "Afghanistan Force Requirements." *Institute for the Study of War and the American Enterprise Institute*. 19 September 2009. <http://www.aei.org/docLib/20090921-Kagan-Afghanistan.pdf>.
- Kagan, Fred and Kim Kagan. "Defining Success in Afghanistan." *Institute for the Study of War and the American Enterprise Institute*. 7 January 2011. <http://www.understandingwar.org/files/DefiningSuccessinAfghanistanElectronicVersion.pdf>.

- Kahl, Colin. "When to Leave Iraq." *Foreign Affairs*. July/August 2008. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64458/colin-h-kahl-and-william-e-odom/when-to-leave-iraq>.
- Kalyvas, Stathis. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Khan, Huma. "Gates Says Afghan Withdrawal Deadline May be Delayed." *ABC News*. 2 December 2009. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Afghanistan/afghanistan-president-obama-lays-strategy-troop-surge/story?id=9224638>.
- Kilcullen, David. *Counterinsurgency*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Kilcullen, David. "Counterinsurgency Redux." *Small Wars Journal*. Accessed 28 January 2011. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/kilcullen1.pdf>.
- Kirkup, James. "Lisbon: US and Britain Differ over Afghan Combat Exit in 2014." *The Telegraph*. 20 November 2010. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/defence/8148892/Lisbon-US-and-Britain-differ-over-Afghan-combat-exit-in-2014.html>.
- Korb, Lawrence. "The Promised Withdrawal from Iraq." *Center for American Progress*. 27 February 2009. http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/02/promised_withdrawal.html.
- Kornacki, Steve. "Hillary's First 100 Days." *The New York Observer*. 21 January 2009. <http://www.observer.com/2009/politics/hillarys-first-100-days>.
- Mack, Andrew. "Counterinsurgency in the Third World: Theory and Practice." *British Journal of International Studies*. Cambridge University Press, October 1975.
- Malkasian, Carter and Gerald Meyerle. "Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How Do We Know They Work?" Strategic Studies Institute, *US Army War College*. 25 March 2009. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubid=911>.
- McGirk, Tim. "Behind the Taliban's Resurgence in Afghanistan." *Time*. 16 September 2009. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1923303,00.html#ixzz0xmZ7YT75>.
- Mora, Edwin. "Obama's July 2011 Drawdown Date for Afghanistan Sends Mixed Messages, Former Afghan Presidential Candidate Says." *CNNNews.com*. 26 May 2010. <http://www.cnnnews.com/news/article/66717>.
- Motlagh, Jason. "Afghans: Divided Over NATO's New 2014 Target." *Time*. 22 November 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2032511,00.html>.
- Nagl, John. *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- "NATO Plans for 2014 Afghan Pullout." *Associated Press*. 19 November 2010. http://www.military.com/news/article/nato-readies-2014-afghan-pullout-at-summit.html?ESRC=sm_todayinmil.nl.
- "NATO Plots Afghan-Pakistan Strategy." *CNN*. 10 March 2009. <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/03/10/nato.qaeda/index.html>.
- Nordland, Rod. "Karzai Calls on the US to Free a Taliban Official." *New York Times*. 8 February 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/09/world/asia/09afghan.html>.
- Nordland, Rod and Alissa Rubin. "New Afghan Corruption Inquiries Frozen." *New York Times*. 14 September 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/15/world/asia/15afghan.html>.

- O'Hanlon, Michael and Hassina Sherjan. *Toughing it Out in Afghanistan*. Brookings Institution Press, 2010.
- "Overview of the Afghanistan and Pakistan Annual Review." *The White House*. December 2010. http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/pdf/12.15.10_APAR_Overview_Final.pdf.
- Parsons, Christi and Julian Barnes. "Afghanistan Pull Out Date." *Los Angeles Times*. 4 December 2009. <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/dec/04/world/la-fg-obama-afghan4-2009dec04>.
- Partlow, Joshua. "Karzai Criticizes US Timeline for Leaving Afghanistan." *Washington Post*. 26 August 2010. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/26/AR2010082603882.html>.
- Partlow, Joshua and Javed Hamdard. "Afghan Investigators Decry Dropped Charges in Karzai Aide's Corruption Case." *Washington Post*. 9 November 2010. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/09/AR2010110904659.html>.
- Partlow, Joshua and Karen DeYoung. "Afghan Government Falls Short in Kandahar." *Washington Post*. 2 November 2010. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/02/AR2010110206269.html>.
- Partlow, Joshua and Scott Wilson. "Obama Presses Karzai for Cooperation." *Washington Post*. 29 March 2010. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/28/AR2010032800828.html>.
- President Barack Obama. "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan." United States Military Academy. West Point, New York. 1 December 2009. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>.
- President Barack Obama. "Remarks by the President on Responsibly Ending the War in Iraq." Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. 27 February 2009. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-of-President-Barack-Obama-Responsibly-Ending-the-War-in-Iraq/
- President Hamid Karzai quoted in interview with Christine Amanpour on "Amanpour." *CNN*. 6 December 2009. http://articles.cnn.com/2009-12-06/world/us.afghanistan.karzai_1_afghan-president-hamid-karzai-training-afghan-security-forces-afghanistan?_s=PM:WORLD.
- Rashid, Ahmed. *Descent into Chaos*. Viking Press, 2008.
- Riechmann, Deb. "Afghan, NATO Forces Brace for Spring Offensive Against Taliban." Associated Press, *Washington Post*. 7 February 2011. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/07/AR2011020703651.html>.
- Riechmann, Deb. "Clinton Asks Karzai to Modify His Ban." Associated Press, *Philadelphia Inquirer*. 24 October 2010. http://www.philly.com/inquirer/world_us/20101024_Clinton_asks_Karzai_to_modify_his_ban.html.
- Rivera, Ray. "Defiant Legislators Vow to Open Afghan Parliament." *New York Times*. 20 January 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/21/world/asia/21afghan.html?ref=world>.
- Rubin, Alissa. "Many Karzai Afghan Cabinet Choices are Rejected." *New York Times*. 2 January 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/03/world/asia/03afghan.html?_r=1.
- Senator Barack Obama's Statements during a Democratic Presidential Candidate Debate. St. Anselm College. Manchester, New Hampshire. 5 January 2008. See transcript at *ABCNews.com*. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/DemocraticDebate/story?id=4092530&page=2>.
- Senor, Dan. "Obama's Obscene Iraq Fantasy." *New York Post*. 9 January 2008. http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/item_2u3fk0vRR17UJAjyBWcuoL.

- Shalizi, Hamid. "Afghans Say Withdrawal Timeline 'Invigorates' Taliban." *Reuters*. 25 August 2010. <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFTRE67O2SS20100825?sp=true>.
- Shultz, Richard. "Coercive Force and Military Strategy: Deterrence Logic and the Cost-Benefit Model of Counterinsurgency." *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 4. December 1979.
- Trofimov, Yaroslav. "Karzai Divides Afghanistan in Reaching Out to Taliban." *Wall Street Journal*. 10 September 2010. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703720004575476913015061570.html>.
- "Turning the War's Tide: What Some Afghans Think." Afghanistan Crossroads. CNN. <http://afghanistan.blogs.cnn.com/2010/09/09/turning-the-wars-tide-what-some-afghans-think/>
- Tyson, Ann. "US Learned its Lesson, Won't Abandon Afghanistan, Gates Says." *Washington Post*. 9 September 2009. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/08/AR2009090802802.html>.
- US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24. *Department of the Army*. December 2006. <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf>.
- US Government Counterinsurgency Guide. Bureau of Political-Military Affairs. *Department of State*. January 2009. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/119629.pdf>.
- US Marine Corps Small Wars Manual, 1940.
- Vice President Biden quoted in interview with David Gregory on "Meet the Press." *NBC*. 19 December 2010. <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2010/12/biden-2014-afghan-withdrawal-hell-high-water/>
- Wadhams, Caroline. "Why We Should Keep to the July 2011 Timeline in Afghanistan." *Center for American Progress*. 8 September 2010. http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/09/afghanistan_timeline.html.
- Washington Post/ABC News Poll of the American People. 10-13 March 2011. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/postpoll_03142011.html.
- Wehner, Peter. "Obama's War." *Commentary Magazine*. April 2008. <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/viewarticle.cfm/re-rethinking-iraq-br---obama-s-war-11263#two>.
- Woodward, Bob. "Biden Warned Obama during Afghan War Review not to get 'locked into Vietnam.'" *Washington Post*. 28 September 2010. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/27/AR2010092704850_2.html?sid=ST2010092805438.
- Woodward, Bob. *Obama's Wars*. Simon & Schuster Publishers, 2010.
- World Public Opinion Poll. "Afghan Public Overwhelmingly Rejects al-Qaeda, Taliban." *Program on International Policy Attitudes*. January 2006. <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brasiapacificra/155.php?nid=&id=&pnt=155&lb=bras>.