The Failures That Shaped (and Almost Lost) the Afghan War

Afghanistan and the Uncertain Metrics of Progress: Part One

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Overview

The Burke Chair has prepared a seven-part analytic overview of unclassified metrics, and of how their current content relates to the challenges in policy, plans, resources, and management of the war that now reduce the prospects of victory. It should be stressed that such an analysis is only a way of highlighting key trends and developments within the limits imposed by using unclassified official reporting. Moreover, metrics are not a substitute for the kind of narrative that is critical to understanding the complexity of this war, and that can put numbers, charts, and maps in context. This is a case where facing the real-world complexity of the conflict is essential to winning it.

This first brief highlights the failures that almost lost the Afghan War between 2002 and 2008. Many of the key narratives and metrics that allowed the Taliban to return to Afghanistan and come close to winning a political and strategic victory are not available in unclassified form or do not lend themselves to summary metrics.

The Areas Where Metrics are Available: Losing the War by Failing to Resource It and Manage the Resources That Were Provided

The metrics in this report show that the US and allied failure to adequately resource the Afghan campaign between 2002 and early 2009. The US gave the Iraq War priority to the extent that it did not provide the troops or funds necessary to prevent the Taliban from reentering and dominating much of the country. A combination of US and allied underfunding ensured that no credible effort was made to resource the creation of Afghan security forces until 2009, when the Taliban and Haqqani networks posed a major threat.

SIGAR, Inspector General, and GAO reporting show that these failures were compounded by erratic programming and funding, and a total lack of effective control over spending and the contracting effort.

Military spending on a contractor force that exceeded the number of troops deployed led to massive waste, gross inflation of prices, a pervasive climate of corruption, and abuses like struggles between power brokers and tolerance of the payment of protection money to the Taliban. This vastly increased the cost of the war, seriously hurt the regular Afghan economy, and damaged the reputation of the Afghan Government (GIROA) and its popular support.
Overview - II

As Part IV of this serious shows, these failures were compounded by setting goals for aid and development that were almost totally unrealistic in terms of feasibility, probable funding relative to real world cost, and Afghan capacity to absorb aid money. Far too little attention was paid to projects that would win the support of the Afghan people in the near term, and the flow of aid funds to power brokers increased the contracting and corruption problems that alienated many Afghans from their government. These problems were compounded by aid projects that reflected the priorities of donor countries and NGOs rather than Afghan needs and desires, and often supported given Afghan factions at the expense of others.

Moreover, much of the lack of Afghan capacity to manage resources was the result of a failure to fund and support the Afghan civil service that did exist at the time of the invasion, and creating pay scales for military and aid contracting programs, ISAF, and aid efforts that ensured that many qualified Afghans chose to work for foreigners and not the Afghan government. This was made still worse by the failure to create effective means of funding provincial and district governments in the new constitution that was largely imposed on the Afghan government by foreign advisors, and by the ease with which power brokers and those who chose to be corrupt could acquire vast funds and then acquire the political power to win contracts and/or divert funds to their own benefit. Serious efforts to fix these problems only began in late 2010, and were still in the process of implementation in mid-2011 – nearly a decade after the war began.

As Parts IV-VI of this series show, the key resource shortfalls that empowered the Taliban and other insurgents from 2002-2008 have been largely corrected. The key challenge now is whether the US and its allies will sustain these levels long enough to allow the Afghan government and Afghan forces to make a successful transition as outside force leave Afghanistan.

**The Areas Where Metrics are Lacking or Only Present in Limited Form**

Resource issues, however, are only part of the reason why the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated so sharply between 2002 and 2009. The broader failures in the US and ISAF war effort included lack of unity and realism in ISAF, an ineffective UN effort, and political decisions to ignore or understate Taliban and insurgent gains from 2002-2009, to ignore the problems caused by weak and corrupt Afghan governance, to understate the risks posed by sanctuaries in Pakistan, and to emphasize the value of tactical ISAF victories while ignoring the steady growth of Taliban influence and control.
• Mirror imaging of US and European values in trying to create a political system, and central government structure that did not allow for a lack of capacity, effective local and regional government, and a justice system based on Afghan values and practices.

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

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

• Intelligence failures:

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

They also, however, were driven by political decisions to ignore or understate Taliban and insurgent gains from 2002-2009, to ignore the problems caused by weak and corrupt Afghan governance, to understate the risks posed by sanctuaries in Pakistan, and to emphasize the value of tactical ISAF victories while ignoring the steady growth of Taliban influence and control.

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

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

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

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

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

Moreover, while efforts were finally made to create a central coordinator for civil programs, and integrated civil-military plans in 2010, these plans remain largely conceptual. There still are only tentative metrics and analyses that show real progress in these areas, that reflect meaningful fiscal controls and measures of effectiveness, or that provide a picture of how civil programs in governance, rule of law, and economic aid relate to military efforts.

• **Failure to create effective Afghan forces:**

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

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

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

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

• Failure to create effective aid and development programs:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As is discussed in more detail in Parts Two-Five, no serious effort was made until 2011 to create and implement a longer term plan to create a mix of Afghan government and security capabilities that could stand on its own, to define goals that would allow ISAF and the US to withdraw forces and limit their military and aid efforts over time. Instead, a constant stream of new polices and plans emerged to the point where the US, ISAF, and other outside actors tended to make every year the “first year” in Afghanistan.

• **The Need for More Data and Transparency**

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

At the same time, it is critical to stress that the other parts of this report show that progress is being made in addressing many of the issues involved, and metrics are only part of that story. For all of the omissions that still affect reporting on the war, major progress has occurred over the last two years, and additional major efforts to correct these problems are underway.
The US and ISAF Underreact and Give Priority to Iraq
The US and ISAF Waste Eight Years Losing By Default

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

Terrorism in Iraq vs. Afghanistan: 2005-2009

Source: National Counterterrorism Center: *Annex of Statistical Information, Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, Offices of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Department of State 2009
Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan: 2001-2011

In response to the Administration’s request, Congress approved $128.8 billion in war funding for Iraq and Afghanistan in the FY2010 DOD Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-118, enacted December 19, 2009).

In December 2009, after a second review in response to further pressures from military commanders for additional troops continuing to cite worsening security, President Obama approved an additional increase of 30,000 troops bringing the total number of U.S. total to 98,000 by this fall.13 The FY2011 budget adds another 4,000 support troops in Afghanistan. 14 Thus, President Obama has approved the deployment of from 56,000 to 60,000 additional troops for Afghanistan by FY2011 (see Figure 1 and Appendix A).

Figure 1. Boots on the Ground in Afghanistan and Iraq, 2001-2010


14 Then-President Bush increased troops in Afghanistan by about 15,000. For FY2011 increase, see Figure 6-2, DOD, FY2011 Budget Request: Overview, February 1, 2010; http://comptroller.defense.gov/defbudget/fy2011/FY2011_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf.
An Increasing Commitment

Number of American troops in Afghanistan, in thousands.

Source: U.S. Central Command
ISAF Troop Levels: Under-Reacting and Losing

Source: NATO/ISAF Placemats
Following the Money:

Iraq Got It;
Afghanistan Did Not Until FY2010,
and the Future is Now Uncertain
Funding Iraq at the Expense of the Afghan War: FY2001-FY2011
(In Current $US Billions)

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

(In Current $US Billions)

CRS Estimate of Average Monthly DOD Spending on Iraq and Afghan Wars FY 2001 - FY2011

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

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<th>FY05</th>
<th>FY06</th>
<th>FY07</th>
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* Includes pending requests

## Table 3. Estimated War Funding by Operation, Agency and Fiscal Year: FY2001-FY2012

(CRS estimates in billions of dollars of budget authority)

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These data show only a limited decline in the FY2012 military effort. Such figures are preliminary but some working estimates for FY2013 go much further and cut US OCO spending to $80-$90 billion. The projections for aid reflect much more immediate cuts, and fall far below current development goals. These data are shown in Part IV of this series.
The Cost of Underspending: Guesstimate of Annual and Cumulative Cost of “Worst Cost” Success in the Afghan War: FY2010-FY2020
(In Current $US Billions)

- Extremely intense fighting with dropping allied support.
- "Supplemental" in FY2010
- Make decisive gains by FY15.
- US and ISAF withdrawal cautiously during FY15-FY17
- Fully fund ANSF and civil programs through withdrawal

--- Maintain significant support funding of Afghan forces and government through FY2020 & beyond
--- DoD pays cost of police as well as armed forces, and protection of remaining civil & military advisory presence though FY2020.

How Under-Reaction Shaped Today’s War: Expansion of combat Areas and Insurgent Influence at the End of 2009
Prelude to a New Strategy
Key Security Trends: 2009-2010

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

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report, July 2010, p. 66.
Whistling in the Dark: The Growth of Insurgency from 2003-2009
The Rising Insurgency 2003-2009

• The seasonal rise in major acts of violence was far less important that the growth of Taliban influence to cover much of the country and key population centers.
• US and ISAF won every major tactical clash, but lost much of the country.
• Taliban influence exploited lack of Afghan government presence, Afghan corruption, lack of prompt justice system, dysfunctional aid projects, faltering efforts to develop ANSF.
• US and ISAF lacked the force numbers and civilian aid workers to approach critical mass and have an impact in much of the country.
• Allied countries ISAF denied the scale of the insurgency and the seriousness of its rise. Issued intelligence and other reports claiming success that did not exist.
• Combat metrics did not measure key lower levels of violence like threats, night letters and intimidation, selective attack on tribal leaders, kidnappings, forced marriages, payoffs to young men.
• The US and ISAF remained kinetic through 2009; the insurgent fought a battle of influence over the population and political attrition to drive out the US and ISAF from the start.

The insurgency in Afghanistan has expanded geographically.

The Insurgency had momentum in much of the South and East.
NATO/ISAF Events Map in 2008

Change In Kinetic Event Density
1 Jan - 28 Dec 07 and 08

Decreased events in select areas
- Kabul: City 47%; Province 15%
  - ANSF deaths down 61%
- Garmsir: 43%

Kinetic Event Density
Increasing

- 31% more kinetic events in '08 - same areas
- Increased event levels due to:
  - More ISAF / ANSF operating in more areas
  - Increased asymmetric methods
  - Continued sanctuary in PAK

*Density range / calibration differs from province to district in order to show differences
Security Summary (April 2009)

- 64% increase in Insurgent Initiated Attacks
- 80% of attacks occurred in 13% of the districts (Jan-Apr 09)
- IED events up 80% (IEDs caused 60% of casualties Jan-Apr 09)
- 28% increase in CF force strength
- 38% increase in ANA force strength
- 59% increase in CF offensive events

January to April 2009
Kinetic Activity Density Plot
By District

• More Activity
• Less Activity

Footnotes on Sources:
1 JOIS, 4 May.
2 ANQAR Survey, 31 Mar.
3 CJOC CivCas cell, 2 May.
4 CSTC-A, 4 May.
5 CJ1, 3 May.

• Civilian Deaths: down 44%
• ISAF/OEF Deaths: up 55%
• ANSF Deaths: up 25%
(Since Jan 07, ANPs suffered 1.8x more deaths than ANA+ISAF)
• Attacks on GiRoA officials & district centers: up 90%
• Kidnappings/Assassinations: down 17%

Afghan Perceptions (Mar 09)
- 35% of Afghans say security is better now than it was 6 months ago (last quarter survey results: 28%)
- 13% say security is worse than it was 6 months ago (last quarter survey results: 17%)

ANA:
• 50 of 79 Kandak battalions capable of independent ops
• Average of 83 total deliberate ops per week in ’09 (37 in ’08)

ANP:
• Focused District Development: 52 districts completed training
  - 14 of 20 Civil Order Police Battalions fielded

ABP:
• Focused Border Development: 2 cycles complete (20 companies)
  - 3rd and 4th Cycles underway (14 companies programmed)
IED Casualties in Afghanistan
Jan 2004-May 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Terrorist Attacks in Afghanistan</th>
<th>Afghan Attacks with at least 1 killed, injured, or kidnapped</th>
<th>People killed, injured, or kidnapped in Afghanistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>1,557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>962</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>3,532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1,124</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>4,657</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1,222</td>
<td>982</td>
<td>5,453</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2,126</td>
<td>1,480</td>
<td>7,584</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

**ANA**

Total Attacks: 1,277

- 2006 (Oct 1-Dec 31): 103
- 2007: 414
- 2008: 568
- 2009 (Jan 1-June 20): 192

**ANP**

Total Attacks: 2,839

- 2006 (Oct 1-Dec 31): 194
- 2007: 565
- 2008: 1,148
- 2009 (Jan 1-June 20): 532
Taliban Influence and Military Activity Coincided with Population Density

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

Afghanistan Security Incidents
January – October 2009

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report, July 2010, p. 57-58