

A Way Forward in Afghanistan

Wesley Street

Missouri State University

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## Introduction

There is probably not an adult on the planet that has not heard of Afghanistan. During the 1980's, the Soviet Union (USSR) invaded and attempted to subdue the indigenous population. During the early 1990s, a pro-Western secular government attempted to govern the country but they were defeated by the Taliban who then imposed a harsh form of Islamic government. The Taliban also gave refuge to Osama bin-Laden (UBL) and his Al-Qaeda (AQ) terrorist group after they were expelled from the Sudan. After the attacks on the U.S. on September 11, 2001 (9/11) by al-Qaeda, the U.S. led an invasion of Afghanistan to destroy AQ and remove the Taliban government sheltering them. For the past fifteen years, the U.S. and its allies have been combating terrorism and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

As small as the country of Afghanistan is, it has played a significant part in at least the footnotes of history. It has the reputation of an unconquerable, uncontrollable country of wild men. This is an over exaggeration and simplification of Afghanistan. It was conquered and governed by different groups; however, most of these were not enduring regimes which often did not encompass the entire country. Afghanistan as a country in a loose interpretation of the word because of tribal and ethnic divisions.

Afghanistan is domestic and an international problem seeking a solution. The U.S. and partners seek to disengage from combat roles in this country while trying to ensure that the democratic government does not collapse and result in the chaos of the 1990s. 15 years of combat has created a refugee crisis with people fleeing the fighting. It has cost the U.S. and its allies trillions of dollars and thousands of lives. The result today is still not a strong Afghan

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government or army, an influential Taliban force, and no successful resolution in sight. Finding a solution is crucial to world security and preventing a land for terrorist training and haven from which international attacks, like 9/11, could be launched.

## Afghan Invasions

Many wars and invasions of Afghanistan have taken place in the last several millennia. One of those often cited by historians is that of Alexander the Great in 330 B.C. Alexander was chasing Darius of Persia in revenge for the death of Alexander's father. A governor in what is today northern Afghanistan murdered Darius and proclaimed himself king of the crumbling Persian empire, forcing Alexander to pursue him instead. During this campaign, Alexander's army faced an opponent using guerrilla warfare. In approximately one year, Alexander had conquered or bought off most of modern day Afghanistan and scores of Greeks and Macedonians moved to this region. Alexander even married a local chieftain's daughter. This success was short lived because Alexander was wounded in India in 326 B.C. and died a few years later. The Greek governors in Afghanistan divided the territory and were eventually overthrown.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century twice saw the British Empire invade Afghanistan to combat Russia expansion across central Asia toward India. The British were worried by reports of Russian activity in Herat and Kabul, mirroring the route Alexander took to invade India. The British responded by invading Afghanistan in 1838, eventually pushing to Kabul and installed a puppet government. The Afghans revolted in and the British retreated in early 1842. The most famous incident was the annihilation of a British force of 16,000, including 4,500 soldiers, during the retreat. Only one of these men made it to safety.

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Again, seeking to staunch Russian expansion, the British invaded Afghanistan. This time more successfully because of lessons learned during the First Afghan War. The British defeated Afghan rulers and forced a settlement. The British demanded influence in the country and control of a few key geographical locations. This was agreed to, but compromise weakened the ruler of Afghanistan and eventually led to more fighting. While considered a British victory, the conclusion of the war left almost the same conditions as the beginning.

The legacy of British and Indian relations with Afghanistan is the Durand Line. It was an arbitrary line created by the British in 1893 separating Afghanistan and northwest India which is modern day Pakistan. It created a buffer between British and Russian territorial ambitions in the region. It runs directly through traditional Pashtun tribal lands, dividing the single ethnic group into two separate countries. While this border is internationally recognized, it is not adhered to by the Pashtuns themselves who pass easily from one side to the other. This porous and ill-conceived division is still having consequences more than a century later.

## The Jihad (1979 to 1989)

In 1973, Afghan King Zahir was deposed in a Soviet backed coup by Mohammed Daoud. After 5 unsuccessful years of trying to rally the county to a nationalist agenda, Daoud was deposed and executed in a coup by the more Marxists Noor Taraki. Taraki and the prime minister, Hafizullah Amin, sought to strengthen relations with Moscow and even signed a treaty with the USSR that would allow direct military assistance in the case of an Islamic insurgency. There was a growing rebellion against the current Afghan government and as it intensified, the Soviets sought to replace the current government. In October of 1979, Amin executed Taraki,

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thinking that Amin was going to be replaced. By the winter of 1979 the Soviets had enough and launched an invasion on Christmas Eve. Soviet troops assassinated Amin and replaced him with Taraki's first prime minister, Babrak Karmal.

Over the next ten years, the Soviets would wage an intense and brutal conflict in Afghanistan. They bombed and mined civilian areas. Tens of thousands fled to neighboring Pakistan and Iran. The Soviets had planned for and designed its military to deal with large scale, set piece battle in Europe. These forces were thoroughly unprepared and ill-equipped to fight an insurgency.

The Mujahedeen is an Arabic term for one waging jihad. This was the label used for the Islamic insurgency that sprang up in Afghanistan. This anti-Soviet insurgency started with local warlords and tribal groups. These groups then evolved into an Islamic based insurgency for two reasons: first, the ethnic groups were traditionally Islamic and found Soviet atheism loathsome and second, because of foreign money flowing in from conservative Gulf States, being Islamic made sense. Along with money flowing in from countries like Saudi Arabia, young men also came to join the fight bringing a much more conservative and austere interpretation of Islam with them.

The U.S. gave hundreds of millions of dollars to the Afghan fighters through proxy via Pakistan. This allowed Pakistan to control U.S. policy and interests during the conflict. It meant that U.S. money was funneled to those whom the Pakistanis liked the most and were working in the best interest of that country, not necessarily the U.S.. The U.S. brokered deals to provide arms and ammunition. In one of the strangest coups of the conflict, the U.S. brokered an arms deal to supply Soviet arms captured by Israel during the Six Day War to the Mujahedeen fighting

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the Soviets. The U.S. was also able to get Saudi Arabia to match dollar for dollar, money being sent in support of the Mujahedeen (Charlie Wilson's War).

There was an unfortunate side effect in Pakistan due to U.S. funding. The ISI, Pakistani Intelligence, grew immensely powerful and was run but ultra conservative Islamist. The ISI was able to back and create Islamist groups. Even after the Soviet withdraw, the ISI could generate Islamist fighters to back the Taliban and fight on behalf of the ISI in Kashmir. This continued into the U.S. War in Afghanistan, where the government of Pakistan verbally supported the U.S. while the ISI continued to back the Islamist insurgency.

There were other groups fighting the Soviets as well, but since they were not Pakistani aligned Pashtuns, they received very little of the support slowing through Pakistan. These were groups comprised of Sunni and Shia Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara and other minorities. These groups supported their war efforts by drug smuggling, money and supplies from Iran and the UK, and minor direct support from the U.S.. Thankfully these groups and commanders would survive the Soviets and eventually form the Northern Alliance which fought the Taliban and provided a foothold during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11.

## Post-Soviet Government and the Rise of the Taliban (1989 to 2001)

In 1989, the Soviet Union had had enough and began a the withdraw from Afghanistan. The left Mohammad Najjubullah as president of Afghanistan. The ruling communist party had tried to distance itself from the atheism of the USSR in the late 1980s by removing communist symbols and replacing Islamic ones. It was a move to help assuage the Islamic population

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supporting the Mujahedeen. In 1990, the constitution of Afghanistan officially proclaimed it as an Islamic state.

The end of the Soviets direct occupation of Afghanistan essentially ended U.S. involvement as well. The support provided to Pakistan and the Pashtun Mujahedeen over the past decade continued weaken the new Afghan government. Pakistan and the ISI continued to support the Muj commanders they championed during the 1980s to continue fighting. Pakistan wanted to ensure open and friendly trade routes through Afghanistan. This led directly to the support of the Taliban and eventually the collapse of the Afghan government.

A major problem in post-Soviet occupation was warlords and a weak central government. The warlords controlled territory, the drug trade, extorted tolls on highways, and kidnapped boys and girls and forced them into sexual servitude. Drugs and sexual servitude were offensive to traditional Islamic society. Pakistan's large illicit smuggling trade wanted to be able to operate across Afghanistan and paying multiple tolls across this route affected profitability.

The Taliban are a direct offspring of the combination of conservative Islamic support during the Soviet-Afghan war, the U.S. letting Pakistan administer its foreign aid, rampant lawlessness in Afghanistan, and a weak central government. It initially started as a small revolt in Kandahar province against a warlord. It quickly gained momentum and eventually support from Pakistan. Pakistan saw a force that could form a more acceptable and cooperative government. The Taliban's goal was to form an Islamic Caliphate based in the 7<sup>th</sup> century time of Muhammad.

Millions of dollars were spent by Saudi Arabia in aid to Afghan refugees in Pakistan. This included the building of Madrasas, religious schools, and teaching the Sunni Wahhabi

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Islam. In these schools, young boys were only taught from the Koran. Wahhabism is the national religion of Saudi Arabia which includes repression of women and extreme conservatism. Wahhabism teaches a return to strict Koranic values and eschew modern innovations.

The Taliban quickly spread across southern Afghanistan and laid siege to Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. For several years, the Taliban shelled the capitol until they finally broke the siege in 1996. They quickly executed Najibullah and his brother while issuing death warrants against others in the previous government. Now, firmly entrenched in Kabul, the Taliban imposed the strictest Islamic system found anywhere in the world. Women were banned from working as well as the closing of girl's schools and colleges. Women were also forced to wear the Hijab, which is a black robe covering everything except the hands and eyes. Outlawed was the playing of music, TV, playing of games and the Afghan tradition of kite flying. Punishments for thieves was the amputation of hands and feet while the punishment for drinking liquor was lashing.

One of the most legendary and important leaders in Afghanistan was Ahmad Shah Massoud, known as the Lion of Panjshir. He was a Tajik who fought the Soviets and defended his territory against invasion. He was the Secretary of Defense in the Najibullah government and was the main reason the Taliban had to fight so hard against the weak government. After the fall of the Afghan government, Massoud retreated to the Panjshir valley and successfully defended it against the Taliban and Pakistani forces. He was assassinated by Al-Qaeda on September 9, 2001 in an attempt to secure Al-Qaeda's refuge in Afghanistan after the impending attacks on September 11, 2001.



## Operation Enduring Freedom (2001-present)

The U.S. invaded Afghanistan weeks after 9/11. The CIA, Army Special Forces (SF, Green Berets), and other Special Operations Forces (SOF) started by coordinating and leading the Northern Alliance. They were the majority non-Pashtun forces located in north Afghanistan that were led by Massoud until just weeks before. This combined force quickly pushed the Taliban south by leveraging U.S. airpower and technology against its opponents. The U.S. was also essential in bringing anti-Taliban Pashtuns into the fight in southern Afghanistan. The U.S. was very worried that a Northern Alliance capture of Kabul would only inflame the Pashtun population and return to a situation like a decade before.

Some of the enemies the U.S. led coalition were fighting were the exact same that were backed by the ISI with U.S. money during the 1980's. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was one of those who had a contentious relationship with Pakistan and other Mujahedeen, but after the U.S. invasion, he supported an insurgency. Jalalludin Haqqani was another former Mujahedeen that had close ties with the Taliban, AQ, and the ISI. The Haqqani Network swiftly became a major threat in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan due to their safe refuge inside of Pakistan. It is thought that Haqqani assisted UBLs escape into Pakistan.

Despite an entrenched and determined enemy, the Coalition made rapid progress against the Taliban and AQ. Hamid Karzai, whom was a Pashtun himself, supported by SF, gained momentum in the south against the Taliban. He was eventually appointed as president of Afghanistan by a council of Afghans and was elected after a government was established and elections held. In less than a year, Afghanistan seemed to be well on its way to establishing a

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functioning democratic government. There were some remaining pockets of resistance, but the Taliban was no longer a relevant opponent.

Afghanistan was a proving ground for SOF and all the training it had conducted over the years. It was a text book example of SF working with an indigenous force in conducting asymmetric warfare. It also proved that conventional units from the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division could work under an SOF command. There was also an international coalition which was led by American SOF as well.

With the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, many resources were diverted to this, conflict and Afghanistan was placed on the back burner. This was also not helped by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The U.S. turned over combat operations in southern Afghanistan, the traditional home of the Taliban, who in turn did not maintain a deterrence presence in this region. This allowed a Taliban resurgence and increased violence. In response, the big, conventional Army tried to involve itself more and more, and make SOF less relevant. Eventually, there was a shift from a smaller, nimbler, well trained force into a conventional war with SOF being sidelined.

In 2007, the U.S. used a "Surge" strategy to great success in Iraq. With a huge boost in troop numbers, the U.S. forced out Iraqi insurgents and held ground. U.S. commanders saw this and assumed the same type of strategy would work in Afghanistan in 2009. Because of geographical and cultural differences, this was not successful. Later in the Iraq War, a high percentage of the insurgents were foreign fighters, whereas in Afghanistan, the Taliban was a true grassroots insurgency based in the population. Efforts to only push out the insurgents was

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unsuccessful because of their close ties in the local community and a secure area just across the Pakistani border.

Combat operations and stability have not improved significantly in Afghanistan in the past five years since the surge. The surge brought about more friction with the local population and did not have the desired effect for driving the insurgents out. It had the opposite effect in a lot of places with more people being willing to work with, or at least turn a blind eye, to the Taliban. Many of these people are not supportive of the Taliban themselves but are tired of violence, see little choice outside of cooperation, and do not see the government as being able to help them.

## Analysis

### Army Special Forces:

SOF, and particularly Army SF, proved its merits early in operations. SF trains specifically for five mission types: Unconventional Warfare (UW), Direct Action (DA), Foreign Internal Defense (FID), Special Reconnaissance (SR), and Counter Terrorism (CT). These soldiers are experts in guerrilla warfare and able to train a guerrilla force or how to counter it. Their training takes over a year including cultural integration and language training. The soldiers also must be at least 21 years of age bringing a little more maturity and life experience.

Unfortunately, with the expansion of the Army in Afghanistan, policies and Rule of Engagement (ROE) have slowly changed SF in theater. In an effort to prevent U.S. casualties, SF was no longer allowed to operate freely and live with the local population. This is an

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essential part of rapport building, ensuring locals that U.S. and Afghan forces will be able to maintain and protect a cooperating population. It is also a critical part of collecting reliable intelligence. SF was morphed into more a DA force. Only operating on raids and short duration operations without follow on from SOF or conventional forces (CF). This only allows for temporary gains.

Although SF is trained in DA, this is not its focus as it is with other SOF units like the 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regiment, Navy SEALs, and Delta Force. These are always units in theater and can be used for these missions so as not to distract from SF conducting UW and FID missions. Per *Gentleman Bastards*, SF being relegated to DA has atrophied its other capabilities. This focus on DA has meant an increased focus on younger operators wanting to move on to Delta Force and older operators leaving in discouragement.

The Army's direct method for countering insurgencies, like the one of Afghanistan, is Shape-Clear-Hold-Build-Transition. First is to shape the battlespace by identifying elements rooting the insurgency and then attempting to disrupt these. Next is clearing the battlespace of insurgents and end organized resistance. The clearing step is not undertaken unless there are sufficient resources to then hold gained ground. This is an area in which the U.S. military has continually been weak since Vietnam. The holding force should be led by the host nation. The build phase is when the host nation can successfully take responsibility for security operations. They can hold ground and successfully undertake offensive operations against the insurgents. The last step is transition. This is when all activities are turned over to the host nation. SF are the professionals when it comes training, organizing, and leading host nation troops.

Civil Affairs:

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The Army has a Civil Affairs (CA) Specialist career field. These soldiers make up a team of 4, commanded by a captain, that specialize in coordinating military and civilian activities. Almost all the Army's CA capabilities are in the Army Reserve (USAR) with the idea that these individuals bring civilian experiences to these roles. These soldiers are the link between the civilian population and the field commander. They support both SOF and conventional operations. They are trained to quickly identify critical requirements of the civilian population in wartime and peacetime. During the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the percentage of Civil Affairs soldiers deployed was higher than any other in the reserve component. These capabilities are critical in assessing networks during the shape phase. Many of these soldiers also fight alongside conventional and SOF forces during the clear and hold phase.

Intelligence is a major component of counter insurgencies. Because of the rapport building responsibilities of CA, it makes them link in the intelligence collection network. In a personal story relayed by CPT Michael Angeli in 2015, he was talking to a local Iraqi sheik. This sheik happened to see a photo of a high value target (HVT) the task force was after and the sheik knew this person. He arranged for the HVT to turn himself in to be questioned who was subsequently released after it was determined he was not a threat. This type of ability, instead of kicking in doors and possibly killing people unnecessarily, is essential when combating an insurgency.

### Conventional Forces Fighting UW:

The Surge in Afghanistan pushed many conventional forces into theater. These had little understanding of UW and counter insurgency operations. A few hours of additional training were given to non-commissioned officers and above. Soldiers also attended 4 hours of language

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and cultural training. This was not something in which most units continually trained on. By the time soldiers deployed to theater, they relied on a laminated card with a few words of the local language.

In theater, CF units were used in a conventional manner while fighting UW. This is not the most effective use of personnel and their capabilities. In response to improvised explosive devices (IED), soldiers rode in Mine Resistance Ambush Protected Vehicles (MRAP). Most weigh between 40,000 and 80,000 lbs because of heavy armor. These vehicles caused road issues with traffic jams and damage. It also kept American soldiers safe but also caused a disconnect from the local population they were supporting. Soldiers rode around impassively and impersonally, not building the rapport that is required in a counterinsurgency.

## Recommendations

### 1. Return to SF lead mission

SF are professionals in UW and FID. Early in the war SOF, was effectively leading local forces and employing CF forces. SOF, specifically Army Special Forces and Marine Raiders (MARSOC), have been partnering, advising, and leading with Afghan forces effectively. This is a part of Clear, Hold, and Build phases, and the leadership in Afghanistan needs to clearly define objectives and let SOF obtain these using their skills. Often, 12 SF operators will manage several hundred host nation forces, which is a great return for the manpower invested. It does make these operators much more vulnerable, but it is a job they have volunteered for and undertake willingly.

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Recently, each Army Special Forces Group added an additional battalion because of the current worldwide demand and deployments. It is also a long and difficult process to develop an SOF operator along with a high attrition rate. Because of this, most SOF units have a continual shortage of qualified personnel. There should be steps taken to make it easier for those interested to attend selection for this training. There are a lot of qualified personal in the reserve component (RC) that would enthusiastically volunteer, but it is difficult once in the RC to move to active duty. A process for an RC Army Solider to attend SF selection would start by meeting specific physical requirements. Following this is one month of active duty focused on additional physical fitness and advanced soldier skill. In the RC, it is difficult to attain and maintain the level of physical fitness required and proficiency in advanced skills. Upon completion of this phase, soldiers would attend SF selection. Once selected, they would be released from the RC, attend Airborne School, and attend SF qualification course.

### 2. Return CA to SOCOM and use them effectively

One change that should be made is to move USAR Civil Affairs back underneath USSOCOM. In 2006, it was moved from USSOCOM to United States Army Reserve Command (USARC). It was not a move that was supported by CA or SOCOM. Under SOCOM, CA soldiers would have opportunities to attend more specific training, like language training, and produce better results. The active component of CA requires soldiers to have prior military experience and attend a selection process. This process should be replicated in the RC. It would increase the skill set and professionalism of the CA mission. There has been a decrease in CA deployments at a time when it is still needed. These are professional rapport builders and are essential to a counterinsurgency mission.

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### 3. Alignment training for CF

A controversial issue is providing additional training to align conventional units with SF ones. This is not trying to bypass SF, increase production of operators, or create an SF Lite type force. This would be providing in-depth block of training on language, culture, and how the conventional force will be supporting the SF mission. Conventional forces are great for fighting an enemy, but immature and unaware soldiers can also alienate the same civilians they are protecting from an insurgency.

A training block example would be 2 weeks of language and cultural training, training on UW/FID, how the conventional force is supporting the SF counterinsurgency mission, followed by field exercises leveraging training these soldiers have received. While SF is the best trained force for conducting UW/FID, it does not preclude the training of other units in this role. This could either be accomplished prior to deploying or on a semi-annual basis to keep soldiers in these units qualified.

### 4. Set milestones and objectives, not dates

Doctrine for fighting counterinsurgency operations does not include publishing a timetable. Nowhere is time a part of Shape-Clear-Hold-Build-Transition. Success for each step should be defined and then goals should be in support of each step. Planners must not be scared to reassess and redefine objectives for each step if something is not successful. A continually failed plan should not continually be executed. With the Obama administration's continuous push to reduce the U.S. presence in Afghanistan without regard to what the ground situation is, it tells the Taliban if they are just willing to wait it out, the U.S. will no longer be a threat.

### 5. Encourage and support Pakistani anti-Taliban operations if effective



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Pakistan should be an essential partner in operations against the Taliban. One of the major issues of the past 15 years is that Taliban insurgents rest and recuperate in Pakistan. In traditional Pashtun areas, they find safety from ISAF forces. Because of the Taliban's extreme views, it has attacked targets in Pakistan. In return, Pakistan has realized the Taliban problem and has been increasing combat operations. While it is still hard to determine who can be trusted in Pakistan, operations can be coordinated across the border. If progress is not being made, the U.S. should be willing to apply pressure to Pakistan to change its operations.

### 6. Money

In Iraq, the U.S. funded Sunni militias and groups to provide protection for local populations and work with Americans. This worked well and greatly decreased violence in places like Fallujah and Ramadi. There was a program to pay Taliban to stop fighting which showed some success; however, this would be directly supporting farmers and towns in vulnerable areas. Using this approach would give Afghans options other than working with the Taliban or local warlords. In Afghanistan, farmers are paid by the Taliban to grow poppies and marijuana which funds the Taliban but allows the farmers to support themselves. ISAF tried burning poppy fields and it only resulted in increased violence. The Taliban was not able to gather their crop, and the farmers and families were forced to fight temporally in repayment for the lost crop. The U.S. needs to enable options for these people other than the Taliban. This is an area that CA should excel in. There is an old proverb, "You cannot buy the loyalty of an Afghan, but you can rent it, temporally."

### 7. Learn from past mistakes

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Looking toward future world hotspots, there should be some lessons learned from the 1980's when the U.S. provided funds for Pakistan to disburse as it saw fit. This left an environment for Pakistan to support groups Islamist groups that saw the U.S. as just as much of an enemy as they did the Soviet Union. It is a gross waste and negligence of U.S. tax dollars when funding is being funneled to groups who hate the U.S. Many commanders and leaders who would have been more reliable and amenable to western views were not supported by the U.S. Instead, they found support from Iran and ironically Russia.

What does this mean for homeland security?

A secure Afghanistan has a long-term impact on homeland defense. First, a secure Afghanistan prevents an extremist government from returning to power. In the 1990s, the U.S. was unwilling to kill or capture UBL but managed to successfully pressure governments to expel him. Finally, he returned to Afghanistan and secured a safe place for Al-Qaeda to plan and train. From here, Al-Qaeda attacked two embassies in Africa, the USS Cole, and finally the World Trade Center and Pentagon on 9/11.

The failure of U.S. and international policy in the Syrian Civil War set an environment that created the Islamic State. This terrorist group flourished in the chaos of an unsettled government facing a civil war. It spread into Iraq due to a weak Iraqi government and the unhappiness or apathy of Sunni Iraqis who were not being represented by the government. The success of IS made it popular and has inspired or directed attacks around the globe. A direct attack is the IS planned 2015 Paris attacks using former combatants from Syria. The terrorist responsible for the 2015 attack in San Bernardino were claimed to have been inspired IS.

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Preventing a similar conducive environment is the responsibility of the U.S. and the international community.

Without the direction of a large terrorist threat from Afghanistan, the military and Department of Defense would be able to direct efforts other places. Other areas needing focus are preventing cyber-attacks from Iran, Russian and China, modernizing the military for future challenges, and training to support disaster missions. The reduction in deployment tempo is starting to finally show in being able to provide a proper training and leadership ensure a mature force. Without stabilizing Afghanistan, the U.S. will face a situation like the current one in Iraq.

## Conclusion

Afghanistan is small in size and in population in comparison to many other countries in the world; however, time after time throughout history, it has held a significance that outweighs this. After the failure of the U.S. to work to secure a future for the Afghans during the 1980s and again in the 1990s, it is imperative that it works to aid the Afghan future. The U.S. and its allies have expended a lot of time, treasure, and blood in this country, and to leave before the job is done is a disservice to all this effort. Possibly, the security of the planet could rely on stability in Afghanistan by preventing a safe training space for Islamist terrorist.

To accomplish stability in Afghanistan, the battle needs to be changed. It should be fought to achieve objectives in counterinsurgencies, not to a political timeline. Once again, the SOF professionals in this field need to lead the fight. There is a place for CF in an SOF mission, but it must be at the direction of units that understand the strategic mission. The U.S. needs to make tough, and possibly unpopular decisions, but a secure Afghanistan is in everyone's interest.

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