

In its war in Afghanistan, the United States has come to a crossroads. President Obama will be forced to choose one of four ways ahead. The choices are expensive and dangerous for our country; so we must be sure that he chooses the least painful, least expensive and safest of the possible choices.

The *first possible choice* is to *keep on doing what we are now doing*. That is, fighting the insurgency with about 60,000 American troops and 68,197 mercenaries at a cost of roughly \$1 million a year per person.¹ Let us be clear, we now actually have a total complement in Afghanistan of over 120,000 people on the public payroll at an overall cost, of roughly \$100 billion a year. We can project a loss of a few hundred American soldiers a year and several thousand wounded. Our senior commander in the Central Command, General David Petraeus, tells us that we cannot win that war. The second possible road ahead would involve *adding substantial numbers of new troops*. In General Petraeus's counterinsurgency doctrine, the accepted ratio of soldiers to natives is 20 to 25 per thousand.² Afghanistan today is a country of about 33 million. (The current ratio is 1 to 430.³) Even if we discount the population to the target group of Pashtuns, we must deal with 15 or so million people. So when in September General Stanley McChrystal asked for 80,000 new troops -- immediately scaled down by the White House to 40,000⁴ -- it could be only a first installment. Soon -- as the generals did in Vietnam⁵ -- they will have to ask for another increment and then another, moving toward the supposedly winning number of between 600,000 and 1.3 million. That is just the soldiers. Each soldier is now matched by a supporter,⁶ rather like medieval armies had flocks of camp followers, so those numbers will roughly double. Thus, over ten years, a figure often cited,⁷ or 40 years, which some of the leading neoconservatives have suggested, "pretty soon," as they say in Congress, "we'd be talking about real money."⁸ In addition to the Congressionally-allocated outlay, the overall cost to our economy has not yet been summed up, but by analogy to the Iraq war, it will probably amount to upwards of \$6 trillion.⁹

Then there are the casualties: we have so far lost about a thousand -- or a quarter as many as in Iraq. Casualties we can count, but the number of seriously wounded keeps growing because many of the effects of exposure to modern weapons do not show up until later. We have no reliable figures yet on Afghanistan, but already nearly one in four soldiers have reported "acute stress, depression or anxiety."¹⁰ In Iraq at least 100,000 of the one and a half million soldiers who served there suffered severe psychological damage and about 300,000 have reported post-traumatic stress disorder and a similar number have suffered brain injuries.¹¹ Crassly put, these "walking wounded" will not only be unable fully to contribute to American society but will be a burden on it for many years to come. It has been estimated that dealing with a brain-injured soldier over his remaining life will cost about \$5 million.¹² Cancer, from exposure to depleted uranium is, only now coming into full effect.¹³ It is sobering that 40 percent of the soldiers who served in the 1991 Gulf war -- which lasted only a hundred hours -- are receiving disability payments.¹⁴ Inevitably, more "boots on the ground" will lead to more beds in hospitals.

General McChrystal has laid out *the second possible choice*. In his report, which was immediately leaked to the press, he told the President that we must have large numbers of additional troops to hold the territory we "clear." He echoes what the Russian commanders told the Politburo: in a report on November 13, 1986, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev commented that the Russians attempted the same counterinsurgency strategy but admitted that it failed. "There is no piece of land in Afghanistan," he said, "that has not been occupied by one of our soldiers at some time or another. Nevertheless, much of the territory stays in the hands of the terrorists. We control the provincial centers, but we cannot maintain political control over the territory we seize...Without a lot more men, this war will continue for a very, very long time."

The Russian army fought a bloody, brutal campaign, using every trick or tool of counterinsurgency ever identified. The Russians killed a million Afghans and turned about 5 million into refugees, but after a decade during which they lost 15,000 soldiers and virtually bankrupted the Soviet Union, they gave up and left. General McChrystal says winning may take him a decade or more to "win." But what "winning" means is unclear.¹⁵

The senior Russian general, Boris Gromov opined that "It has been and always will be impossible to solve political problems using force." Oddly, in at least some of his statements, General David Petraeus said much the same: "You cannot kill your way out of an insurgency."¹⁶

Third, we could marginally increase our troop strength. That is, adding only between 10,000 and 30,000 troops and a comparable number of mercenaries. Not the full complement that General McChrystal has now demanded. This road, according to Petraeus, McChrystal and their acolytes would lead to “mission failure.”¹⁷

Not meeting the generals’ demands also brings forward the danger to the Obama administration of being charged with putting our soldiers at risk “with one hand tied behind their backs,” a phrase from the acrimonious aftermath of the Vietnam war which even General James Jones, President Obama’s director of the National Security Council, has recently repeated.¹⁸ The potential ugly campaign, against which even Henry Kissinger has warned us,¹⁹ could pose risks to our political culture -- and even to our legal structure: some military men are already talking about their restiveness in obeying civilian government. “You kind of get used to it after years of service” one Army general said at a convention in Washington last month. Forgetting the constitution, he continued, “We tend to live with it.” Maybe they will or maybe anger will be channeled into a further extension of the military into politics, intelligence and diplomacy.²⁰

For the first time that I know of in recent American history, the uniformed military have created what amounts to a pressure group of their own. Generals Petraeus and McChrystal are the leaders but, by influencing or controlling promotions panels, they have fostered the advancement of middle grade and junior officers who agree with them. Some have been brought into a group called “the Colonels’ Council.” They have participated in what Andrew Bacevich has called a “quasi-coup. A small group of individuals, none of them elected or holding appointed office, had joined forces with military dissidents to engineer a change in policy. Those with statutory responsibility for providing military advice to the president were sidelined. It was an impressive achievement, but its implications are troubling. If [retired General Jack] Keane’s manoeuvre proves a precedent, the chain of command will cease to exist.”²¹ And numbers of retired senior officers have joined not only in what President Eisenhower called the “military-industrial complex” but have become the opinion-makers on foreign policy in the media. Private soldiers and non-commissioned officers have, at the same time, become a major component of the private armies of such groups as Blackwater and form an active part of the constituency of the right wing of the Republican Party.

In the dangerous months and years ahead, if this road is taken, we are apt to hear echoes -- particularly in the next presidential election -- of the post Vietnam rhetoric that the civilians sold out the military. In short, while this option sounds moderate and “business-like” I believe that it is the worst option for President Obama and, more importantly, for the nation.

Or, fourth, we could Get *Out*.

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Since General Stanley McChrystal has been quoted as saying “that no alternatives had been offered besides ‘the helicopter on the roof of the embassy’,”²² an allusion to what happened in Vietnam when policy was not formulated or carried out in a rational and timely way, I will now describe how a rational and timely policy could be effected. In doing this, I want to emphasize that I learned as an official policy planner that a plan is of little value unless it incorporates elements that would make it

- attractive or at least politically feasible for a president;
- foresees a specified allocation of funds to effect it;
- provides a timetable;
- makes clear both benefits and dangers; and
- can be shown to be better than other options.

I begin with the reasons why the President should adopt it:

- Other things being equal, reversing decisions and public statements is not an attractive option for a sitting president. But other things are not equal. I have asserted that the other three options endanger the country and could cost President Obama his job.

- Even if he accepts this evaluation, the president must weigh any potential move in the scale of public opinion: what do the people think? Polls indicate a steady deterioration of support for the war.

But, as any politician knows, the public is fickle and substantial numbers of dedicated and influential people are still strongly in favor of “staying the course” or even getting in deeper. This, of course, is, particularly true of the self-proclaimed military-political strategists (and above all the

neoconservatives who are active in virtually all of the “think tanks” and write influential columns in most of the press not to speak of Fox News). They speak to the sentiment of the far right of the Republican Party.

The President, who after all is a Democrat, would be unlikely to be able to win over the Republican far right by any sort of compromise. He must hope that the general public will reach the conclusion that “staying the course” is costly, does not work and is pointless. But, if he waits until a course of action is completely evident to everyone, it will be probably be too late to implement easily, cleanly and in command of our principal objectives. Thus, a large part of a president’s responsibility is educating the public. If we have a First Lady and even a First Dog, we need him to be our “First Teacher.” He must, in short, work to create an environment in which reasonable policies will be understood and accepted.

- Consequently, the president must choose the timing of his action with great care and in doing so he would be wise to recognize and be prepared to deal with his Republican foes and Democratic rivals. The best way he can do this is to do the job quickly and get it over with well before the next election.

- Timing will be influenced not only by the pace of domestic politics but also by foreign opportunity. Fortunately for him, the President now has been presented with an opportunity. Although at terrible cost to Pakistan’s society, its army has undertaken a campaign against the Taliban in the Pashtun areas of Swat and both Waziristans. Why is this an opportunity or rather how could it be an opportunity? At first sight the answer seems paradoxical: it is that the campaign is unlikely to be completely successful: the Taliban are unlikely to be so stupid as to stand and fight. The proper tactic of the guerrilla is to hit and run.²³ So, recognizing that they cannot win, the Pakistani military will soon offer a cease fire and the Taliban will accommodate.

The Pakistanis have a long history with the Taliban, know them intimately, have subsidized them and have sought in the Taliban a barrier against Indian infiltration of their backyard, Afghanistan. That long-term interest remains despite the current conflict. And, at base, the Pakistanis share with the Afghans, religion, a population of nearly 30 million Pashtuns and the desire to preserve their neighborhood from foreign control. Thus, I believe that in the coming months, they will do what neither the Russians nor we have been able to do -- bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. This move would offer a wise American president an opening to begin the process of turning over the war to our ally Pakistan.

To enable such a course of action to become effective and to encompass Afghanistan, we must set a date for ending our part of the war. Before such a date is announced, negotiations are unlikely. But it is important to be clear: It is the setting of the date rather than actually withdrawing that will enable the process to begin.

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Once the date is set, let us say in late 2010 or early 2011, the villages and tribes, particularly in the southern part of Afghanistan but also soon in the center and north, will begin to jockey for position vis-à-vis one another and with whatever larger authority they think likely to affect their lives. This will almost certainly take the form of their holding village assemblies – known in the south as *jirgas* and in the north as *shuras* or among the Hazaras as *ulus*-- to sort out local issues.

Little known or appreciated outside of Afghanistan, neither by the Russians in their time nor by us today, the *jirga* is the quintessential Afghan means of political action. We need to understand it because, whether we like it or not, it will play a major role in the way the war is brought to a close. I must dilate briefly on it.

The *jirga* is a very old and common Asian way of settling disputes and legitimating ruling authorities. Among the Mongols and Turks, it was known as a *quriltai* and similar assemblies were held by the Iranians. Probably few Americans realize that a native American people, the Iroquois, had a similar way of dealing with military and diplomatic affairs.

Is this just a historian’s indulgence in dredging up the obscure and the antique?

Fortunately, not. *Jirgas* are active at the village level all over Afghanistan today. They are called into being either when village headmen, known as *maliks*, or respected religious figures cannot resolve a dispute or when a new event calls for change of course. The *jirga* is thus a transient event, not a standing institution. Its procedure is set by custom. And it does not aim to mandate or to impose penalties; rather it is a *process* that aims to ventilate grievances, to debate alternatives, to

dissipate angers and to affect accommodations until, at the end a consensus is reached. Voting is not a part of the process. But when a consensus is reached, it is considered absolutely binding and further opposition is regarded as treason. To oppose the consensus could result in expulsion from the community which, in a tribal society, amounts often to a death sentence.

Since many of the problems of each village depend on actions beyond its locale, the village elders will press for and participate in tribal meetings. In turn these participants will be drawn into regional meetings. At the end of the process will be a grand national assembly which is known as a *loya jirga*.

Such meetings have been called on great issues of state for centuries. Three were called in the 1920s to approve fundamental laws, establish the Afghan Muslim orthodoxy and legitimate the change of rulers. Another was called in 1949 to void existing treaties and establish the frontier with Pakistan. In 1955, a *loya jirga* composed of some 360 notables from all over Afghanistan assembled to declare support of an independent "Pashtunistan." Then in 1964, one was assembled to ratify the constitution. Notably, the constitution proclaimed that the *loya jirga* is Afghanistan's ultimate authority, being empowered "to decide on issues related to independence, national sovereignty, territorial integrity as well as supreme national interests" and designated the *loya jirga* to be "the highest manifestation of the will of the people of Afghanistan."²⁴

The Russians were, obviously, opposed to the very concept of the *loya jirga* and managed to by-pass or suppress it. They did so, however, at great cost because without such a legitimating authority, they could not find an Afghan counterpart with which to negotiate an end to their occupation. The puppet government they set up lacked the imprimatur of the *loya jirga* and was not regarded by the people as legitimate. The Russians left with their tail between their legs. So what about us?

As the current Russian ambassador and long-time KGB expert on Afghan affairs, Zamir N. Kabulov, has commented, the Americans have "already repeated all of our mistakes...Now, there're making mistakes of their own, ones for which we do not own the copyright." He went on to say that when Americans come to question him on the Russian experience, "They listen, but they do not hear."²⁵ He was right about the way we approached the *jirga*. In 2002, nearly 2/3rds of the delegates to a *loya jirga* signed a petition to make the exiled king, Zahir Shah, president of an interim government to give time for the Afghans to work out their future. An interim government might have avoided the worst of the problems we have faced in the last seven years. But we had already decided that Hamid Karzai was "our man in Kabul" and did not want the Afghans to interfere with our choice. So, as Thomas Johnson and Chris Mason reported,²⁶ "massive US interference behind the scenes in the form of bribes, secret deals, and arm twisting got the US-backed candidate for the job, Hamid Karzai, installed instead. [They] then rode shotgun over a constitutional process that eliminated the monarchy entirely. This was the Afghan equivalent to the 1964 Diem Coup in Vietnam; afterward, there was no possibility of creating a stable secular government." While an Afghan king could have conferred legitimacy on an elected leader in Afghanistan; without one, as they put it, "an elected president is a on a one-legged stool." Then, as Selig Harrison wrote in the *New York Times*,²⁷ our proconsul, Zalmay Khalilzad, "had a bitter 40-minute showdown with the king, who then withdrew his candidacy."

Among the lamentable results of this policy was that outside of the major cities, few Afghans think of the government as legitimate. Most regard it as a foreign tyranny. Many have not heard of it or do not understand it. "They still look naturally to the tribal '*shuras*' for security and justice."²⁸

Not understanding or being willing to deal with the concept of a *loya jirga*, we have sought to legitimate the men we chose to rule Afghanistan by an election. Doing so has produced a great embarrassment to our government. It isn't only that the recent presidential election was blatantly fraudulent although that is what the press has focused on. Nor was the trumped up competition between Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah important. As a Tajik, there was no way that Abdullah Abdullah could have been a credible candidate. He was just a straw man, put up to make it look like the election was a choice. But even that was not the fundamental flaw: the fundamental flaw was simply that elections – the American way of choosing and legitimating a government – is not the Afghan way. The Afghan way is a *loya jirga*.

It is my belief that the holding of a *loya jirga* is the means that offers the best hope to create a reasonably peaceful, reasonably acceptable and reasonably decent Afghan government.

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So the question is how to convene it. The answer to that question is simple: the Afghans have a traditional way to do so. The central authority, in this case the Parliament, can call for a *loya jirga*.

Will they do it?

Probably not so long as America is willing to pay them off and protect them. So to get them to act, America must set a timetable for withdrawing. Faced with that deadline and the need to protect themselves, the current members of the Parliament will have an interest in espousing what they will see as the national cause, and they will scramble to call for a *loya jirga*.

Participation is traditional. It is made up by the upward thrust of recognized leaders from the village level to the provincial level to the national level. We will have little or no influence on this process and it would not be wise for us to attempt to exercise any. But, realistically, we must anticipate that a vast majority of the delegates, particularly in the Pashtun area, will be at least passive supporters of the Taliban. I do not see any way that this can be avoided. Indeed, even today while we are in occupation, qualified observers uniformly point out that, except when a large contingent of our soldiers is physically present, the insurgents are in control.²⁹ At any given time, they control about 70% of the country. That, as I have pointed out, was also the Russian experience.

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So what are the disadvantages and what are the benefits of the policy I recommend? Let me highlight the potential criticisms:

The first criticism is that the Taliban will emerge from the war as the strongest organization in what at best is a coalition. I do not see any way that this outcome can be avoided – indeed, whether it happens soon or not, it is virtually inevitable in the long run. The idea that we can split the Taliban, engaging with the “moderates” while fighting the “hard liners” is an echo of what we tried in Vietnam. It did not work there and shows no sign of working in Afghanistan. Even after their bloody defeat in 2001, the Taliban suffered no serious defections.³⁰ While our military leaders are still trying, it appears that “the Obama administration has concluded that the Taliban cannot be eliminated as a political or military movement, regardless of how many combat forces are sent into battle.”³¹

The longer we delay the process and the harder we try to prevent it, the more certain it is that the Taliban will dominate. This has been uniformly true of insurgencies for the last two centuries all over the world: those who fought hardest against the foreigners took control.³²

A really free *loya jirga* and one held soon is the best hope to create a more balanced national government. This is partly because in the run-up to the national *loya jirga*, local groups will put forward and struggle to enhance or protect local interests. That will constitute a natural brake on the Taliban which will find itself impelled to compromise. And we should remember that despite all the hype about their early victories, much of the Taliban’s success was the result of negotiation. Today, they enjoy the aura of national defenders against us; once we are no longer a target, that aura will fade.

The second criticism: suppose I am wrong. Suppose the Taliban overawes all the village communities and emerges as the sole arbiter of Afghanistan. What will be the danger to the United States?

Recall that our invasion came about because the Taliban was providing a base – the meaning of the word *al-qaida* – for Usama bin Ladin and his acolytes. Will they come back? Will Afghanistan be a base for terrorism? I don’t think so, or at least not in the same way.³³

The terrorists who attacked New York and Washington on September 11, 2001 were partly trained in the United States and were based mainly in Europe. Propaganda emanated from Afghanistan, but the real work was done elsewhere.³⁴ Terrorists can operate anywhere.

As we, the Taliban and Bin Ladin have discovered, Afghanistan is not a suitable base. It is land-locked, has poor communications, little money to give or lend outsiders and has learned how costly it is to give a free rein to terrorists. True, Usama bin Ladin has been given sanctuary by the Pashtun people and/or by the Taliban. For this, they have paid a heavy price. They will not wish to continue to pay such a price. And, more important, there are ways acceptable within the cultural code of the Pashtun people, the *Pashtunwali*’s imperative of *melmastia* (protection or refuge) that Bin Ladin and his band can be protected but disabled. A protected guest cannot be turned over to his

enemies but he need not be allowed to endanger his hosts. Pakistan, rather than we, should and can take the lead in bringing about this restraint. Pakistan can, indeed, make it a condition for the ceasefire I have mentioned and the ultimate peace it will find to its interest to achieve.

The third criticism that can be directed at this program is that, focused as it must be on the Pashtun community which is Afghanistan's largest group, it could split the country with the northern Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara areas withdrawing. The fact is that those areas are already effectively separated from the Pashtun south. They are under the domination of independent warlords whom we were instrumental in installing and maintaining.³⁵ So the calling of a national assembly will not break up the country; it already is split. But if the *jirga* process begins, I think it is likely to end with a federation which the tribal structure of Afghanistan has always favored.

Even if a sustainable arrangement is not accomplished in the near term, the danger to American interests would be minimal. Indeed, Afghanistan's neighbors (Pakistan, China, Russia and Iran and perhaps India) would (or could be induced to) take a hand to push toward a *modus vivendi* as Henry Kissinger among others has pointed out.³⁶

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If we adopt this policy and allow the process to begin, how can we facilitate it? What will it cost? What will it save? How likely is it to enable us to leave Afghanistan as a viable society? What will be the impact on the danger of terrorism? And, what should we avoid while carrying it out?

The first step, as I have argued, is to set a date for withdrawal. Once this is done, a notable transformation will begin in the psychology of the Afghans. Today, even the non-lethal and beneficial efforts our government and non-governmental organizations make are regarded with suspicion or are rejected. General Petraeus perhaps unwittingly explained why: In describing his counterinsurgency program, he proclaimed that "Money is my most important ammunition in this war."³⁷

The Afghans of course realize this. As Andrew Wilder and his team found in some 400 interviews, "Afghan perceptions of aid and aid actors are overwhelmingly negative."³⁸ And, since they regard all the civic action programs as the "weapons" in the war – as indeed they learned years ago from the Russians who similarly mounted large-scale "beneficial" or civic action programs in Afghanistan³⁹ -- they have often destroyed schools, roads, bridges and even clinics.

But, when the withdrawal pattern is set, the Afghans will have no reason to continue to do so. At that point, aid programs, preferably administered at least in part by other countries or by international agencies will become acceptable and will help smooth the reconciliation process and encourage participation by the local *jirgas*, who after all are concerned with their neighborhoods' prosperity and health. They will then eagerly seek what they now dramatically destroy. Their needs are evident and urgent. Afghanistan is a poor, land-locked, dry country with few resources. Its people have suffered through virtually continuous war for 30 years. Many are wounded or sick. Their normal passage through schools into jobs and secure lives have been disrupted or derailed. They hurt and are tired. They need help. It will be hard for them to employ outside help beneficially, but much can be done to pick up where a reforming government left off in the 1970s. We can and should be a part of this process.

If we are wise, we will do so subtly rather than, as we often manage our aid efforts, with great fanfare. Through the United Nations family of organizations, the World Bank or a coalition of Afghanistan's neighbors, we can provide money for reconstruction projects. Such ventures as the building of farm-to-market roads, the opening of clinics, a program of disease prevention, subsidy for food-grain crops, electrification, purification of water, disposal of waste, etc. will be perceived by the village *jirgas* as unthreatening and beneficial once it is clear that they are not weapons in a counterinsurgency.

What will this cost? If we participate, as we should in our own interest as well as for moral reasons, in these activities, we might consider offering (hopefully with matching funds from others), say, \$5 billion dollars a year for the period the military and their hawkish civilian advisers propose, ten years. That would amount to roughly \$50 billion over a decade.

So what will spending that amount of money save us?

At our current level of activity – before the introduction of more troops – we are "burning" as venture capitalists say, about \$60 billion a year. Next year, our direct costs will probably rise to at least \$100 billion. And even that figure will surely rise in the years to come. So the Congressionally

allocated funds in the coming few years under even the most modest form of “staying the course” would amount to a minimum of \$600 billion and more likely to much more. On top of that, we are otherwise harming our economy so that over a 5 to 10 year period of our current policy the real costs we would incur would probably amount to between \$3 to \$6 trillion.

This is money we don’t have⁴⁰ and will have to borrow from overseas. Those who have opposed expanding health care because of the costs should note that the venture in Afghanistan will be more expensive with no compensating benefit.

The degradation of our currency is one effect of such an outlay: during the period of the Iraq war, the dollar vis-à-vis the Euro has fallen from 80¢ to \$1.50. And currency traders are betting on a further fall. The fall so far means that sovereign funds (notably Japan and China) that have lent us money have lost heavily; a further fall calls into question our ability to borrow at all. Some funds (led by Kuwait) are considering transferring from the dollar to a basket of currencies while others (including South Korea) have stopped buying Treasury notes. If we attempt to make up our shortfall by printing money, inflation is inevitable and will saddle our grandchildren with our debts.⁴¹

In short, by getting out, our saving would be immense, indeed perhaps, truly vital.

I have argued that if we get out soon and provide help for the transition, the Afghans will find their way back to their traditional way of governing themselves. This will not be exactly our way, of course, but they will recreate a viable society. If we look at what has happened in Vietnam in recent years, we have reason to believe in political evolution.⁴² Once the horrors of war recede in memory, the joys of peace become powerful forces. And, in any event, at some point, whether now or years from now, the Afghans will face this challenge; my judgment is that the sooner it happens the more likely and the quicker is achievement of an acceptable degree of success.

What about terrorism? As I have pointed out, terrorists can operate anywhere; they do not need Afghanistan. But they do need the support of people wherever they are. So the more we are seen to be enemies of their religion, opponents of self-determination and supporters of oppressive governments, the greater the danger we face. We cannot completely overcome these charges, but we can blunt or avoid the most blatant and the most unpopular. Three stand out: first, we need to work hard to implement the call President Obama has made for us to recognize that we live in a multicultural world where we must respect the right of others to live their own way; second, we need to repudiate the neoconservative-inspired *U.S. National Defense Doctrine* that asserted our “right” to preëemptively attack any country anywhere at our sole discretion; and, third, we must stop the dangerous and unproductive “James Bond” games of subversion which we have played for years. Otherwise, there will be a continuing incentive for the weak and angry to find means to attack us. This is not to say that we must let down our guard: there are and will continue to be dangerous, deranged and determined malefactors in other countries – just as there are in ours – so we will need to employ a variety of police measures to protect ourselves. But once we are no longer generally seen to be “the enemy,” such psychopaths will be far less dangerous because no longer popular.

Finally, we should avoid moves to create an overwhelming military and police force in Afghanistan. That is what we are being told is necessary. I think that would be a very dangerous and self-defeating move. Every time we provide weapons, as independent observers constantly tell us, the newly empowered force uses them against the public to extort money or goods or to kidnap people or rape their wives and children. It is highly unlikely that such forces can be disciplined by the existing, monumentally corrupt government⁴³ (or by us) for years to come. And even if they were disciplined, they contribute little or nothing to the Afghan economy or society. And, of course, they ultimately pose the danger of a military dictatorship since balancing civil institutions are still and for years will remain weak.

What we should do is to put our emphasis on the creation of a quasi-military force like our Corps of Engineers which could, under proper supervision and with proper funding, make a real contribution to the country. It would also help alleviate the chronic problem of unemployment. The police force should be kept small, only lightly armed, and subject to some supervision by village and tribal *jirgas*.

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What follows?

We are indeed at a cross-roads in our history. The step the President takes on Afghanistan is a step on a road that could lead either to catastrophe or away from it toward a new period of our prosperity, freedom and security.

In one direction, we will move in the direction signposted by the Australian armchair warrior David Kilcullen, the key adviser and ghost writer for Generals Petraeus and McChrystal, and enthusiastically approved by the neoconservatives. They and Petraeus's and McChrystal's new acolytes among junior officers – saw Iraq and see Afghanistan as the first steps in America's crusade, what they have named the "Long War."

The Long war would truly be a march out into the wild blue yonder. The neoconservatives and the new military leaders believe it will last generations. Fifty years is said to be already under planning at the Pentagon.⁴⁴ The cost, even in economic terms, cannot be predicted – numbers lose meaning beyond 15 or 20 trillion dollars. But the ultimate cost will be the end of America's position as the world's leading power. Our standard of living will fall; our sources of borrowing will dry up; and we will stand in danger of the kind of economic implosion that destroyed what in the 1920s was arguably Europe's leading democracy, the Weimar Republic.

While the monetary and general economic costs are the most obvious, my real worry is about the fundamental beliefs and institutions of our country. I confess that I am very emotional about this: I have inherited through my family both a military and a civic tradition that I see being undermined in the name of patriotism. Patriotism is a blunt instrument and can be wielded by dictators – as Herman Göring observed during his trial at Nuremburg -- as often as by democrats.⁴⁵ I don't want to lose the America in which I was born, have served and believe in. So I determined to do what I can to protect and preserve our heritage of freedom, decency and mutual respect. These are the key elements in the social contract we share with one another and which we share with our government. To lose that social contact is to descend into chaos. Of course, "it can't happen here," but let us not forget the fate of the Weimar Republic: it was an economic implosion that did it in.

To the contrary, getting out of Afghanistan, could lead us toward a reassertion of the principles and purposes that have made our country not just respected for its wealth and power but beloved throughout the world. If we make a sincere effort to live up to the message in President Obama's address in Cairo – that we are willing to live in a multicultural world – much of the fear and danger we perceive today will become a bad memory. Then we can truly turn toward the serious business of educating our children, providing our citizens with adequate health care and again becoming for the world's peoples "a city on the hill."

William R. Polk
November 10, 2009

¹ *The Guardian*, March 20, 2009, Julian Borger, "In real terms, Nato is losing" and *The New York Times*, November 15, 2009, Christopher Drew, "High Costs Weigh on Troop Debate for Afghan War."

² *Portside.Org*, Sept 11 09 "Foreign Policy in Focus," Conn Hallinan, "Afghanistan: What are these people thinking?" The field manual on counterinsurgency recommends a ratio of 20 counterinsurgents per 1,000 residents: for Afghanistan, population 33 million, that would be at least 660,000 specially trained soldiers. Also see *The International Herald Tribune*, September 5, 2009, Mark Moyer (professor of national security affairs at the US Marine Corps University) writes that Dennis Blair, director of national intelligence proposes a ratio of 25 troops for each 1,000 Afghans. *The New York Times*, Oct 11, 2009, AP "Afghan Outlook Bleak as Taliban Grabs Territory:" "...a former top commander there, US. Gen Dan McNeill, said in an interview with NPR last summer that 'well over 400,000 troops' are needed to tame the country. He then called it 'an absurd figure,' because Afghanistan will never see that many troops...More troops would mean more forces driving over increasingly lethal roadside bombs." The basic government text is *The U.S. Army [&] Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. Published by the University of Chicago Press in 2007, it has forewords by General David Petraeus and Lt. General James Amos and Lt. Colonel John Nagl.

³ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 2009, Gilles Dorronsoro, "Focus and Exit: An Alternative Strategy for the Afghan War."

⁴ *The New York Times*, November 23, 2009, Elisabeth Bumiller, "In 3 Tacks for Ealating Afghan War, a Game of Trade-Offs."

⁵ *UPI*, September 2, 2009, Arnaud de Borchgrave, "Commentary: Strategic retreat." He points out that when President Kennedy was assassinated we had 16,300 formal advisers redesignated as fighting troops in Vietnam. Five years later, there were 536,000." On January 30, 1968, about 84,000 Viet Minh troops struck at American-occupied targets in South Vietnam. General Vo Nguyen Giap made the same *military* mistake he made by in 1950, escalating too soon from guerrilla tactics to formal warfare against the better armed French forces; his troops could not prevail against the Americans and suffered heavy casualties. But, *politically*, Giap made the masterstroke of the war. Despite the urging of Walt Rostow and the demand for 206,000 more troops by his field general who had outnumbered the Viet Minh regulars more than 6 to 1 before the battles and at least 10 to 1 afterwards, President Lyndon Johnson decided he could not continue. On this, see my book *Violent Politics*, 162 and 180. Also see David Milne, *America's Rasputin: Walt Rostow and the Vietnam War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 213-217.

⁶ *The New York Times*, September 2, 2009, James Glanz, "Contractors Outnumber U.S. Troops in Afghanistan." According to the Congressional Research Service, they averaged 65% of all Pentagon forces in Afghanistan.

⁷ *The Toronto Globe and Mail*, June 12, 2008, Anatol Lieven, "The Dream of Afghan democracy is dead." "In recent meetings involving Nato officials I have been struck by the combination of public acknowledgment that, to achieve real and stable progress in Afghanistan, western forces will probably have to remain there for a generation at least..."

⁸ Congressman John Murtha, the chairman of the subcommittee on military appropriations, has said that expenditures will pass \$1 trillion next year. *The New York Times*, November 15, 2009, Christopher Drew, "High Costs Weigh on Troop Debate for Afghan War."

⁹ See my book, *Violent Politics* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008) where I discuss the study made by Nobel Prize Laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz and former Assistant Secretary of Commerce Linda Bilmes. They calculate that the *real* cost to America, as it would be figured by standard accounting methods, is between one and two *trillion* dollars.⁹ They have since revised their estimates upwards. Indeed some other economists think the costs are more realistically set at about \$6 or even 7 trillion or over half of the yearly Gross National Product of America. As we check the individual costs of Afghanistan, it is unlikely to be a bargain. For example, shipping fuel to Iraq cost about \$40 a gallon whereas in Afghanistan just the shipping cost is reputed to \$400 a gallon.

¹⁰ *The Washington Post*, November 14, 2009, Ann Scott Tyson, "U.S. soldiers' morale down in Afghanistan."

¹¹ I deal with these matters in my book *Understanding Iraq* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).

¹² *The New York Times*, November 12, 2009, Nicholas D. Kristof, "America's Defining Choice."

¹³ I am indebted to Dr. Hans Noll, American Cancer Society Professor of Genetics and Molecular Biology, for the following information: when depleted uranium shells strike their targets, the heat of the impact mutates the uranium into an aerosol of U₃O₈. "It settles as a fine dust, which enters the body in a variety of ways. Uranium oxide is an extremely potent neurotoxin with a high affinity for DNA. This DNA fragmentation, which results in genetic defects like cancer and malformation in developing fetuses. The dust particle, because of its high toxicity, is much more harmful than the low radioactivity associated with it. Inhaled as dust, uranium oxide is accumulating in the lungs, liver and kidneys and affect the nervous system within weeks.

¹⁴ *The New York Times*, October 25, 2006. Nicholas D. Kristof, "On Minute in Iraq = \$380,000.

¹⁵ *The Guardian*, August 15, 2009, Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, "Inside the Taliban: 'the more troops they send, the more targets we have.'"

¹⁶ *International Herald Tribune*, March 4, 2009, Celestine Bohlen, "'Graveyard of empires' with a lesson for U.S."

¹⁷ *IPSnews*, September 23, 2009, Gareth Porter, "U.S. Afghan Campaign Plan Says Key Groups Back Taliban." Mr. Porter points out that by leaking his report to the President, General McChrystal, had made an "obvious effort to force the hand of a reluctant President Barack Obama to agree to a significant increase in U.S. troops."

¹⁸ *TomDispatch.com*, Ma 23, 2009, Tom Engelhardt, "'Gen. McChrystal, Grim Reaper: Obama's New Afghan Commander Will Send Death Toll Soaring."

¹⁹ *International Herald Tribune*, October 5, 2009, Henry Kissinger, "Afghanistan's cruel options."

²⁰ *The Washington Post*, October 8, 2009, Ann Scott Tyson, "Army Officers Criticize Rebuke of Gen. McChrystal." Also see *Rollingstone.com*, October 28, 2009, Robert Dreyfuss, "The Generals' Revolt" and *Tribune Media Services International*, November 3, 2009, William Pfaff, "America Owned by Its Army."

²¹ Andrew J. Bacevich, "The Long War," *The London Review of Books*, March 26, 2009.

²² *The New York Times*, November 13, 2009, Mark Landler and Jeff Zeleny, "Ambassador's U.S. Ambassador General Karl W. Eikenberry, a former military commander in Afghanistan, who opposes sending more troops.

²³ The Taliban has developed quite sophisticated tactics which they have set out in a detailed training manual. See *The Daily Telegraph*, August 18, 2007, Isambard Wilkinson and Ashraf Ali, "How to be a jihadi: Taliban's training secrets."

²⁴ *International Herald Tribune*, September 16, 2009, Ansar Rahel & Jon Krakauer, "Save Afghanistan, look to its past." [Rahel, a lawyer, advised King Muhammad Shah's *loya jirga* committee.]

²⁵ *New York Times*, October 20, 2008, John F. Burns, "An Old Afghanistan Hand Offers Lessons from the Past." He commented that "The more foreign troops you have roaming the country, the more the irritative allergy toward them is going to be provoked."

²⁶ *Christian Science Monitor*, August 20, 09, Thomas H. Johnson (research professor at the Naval Postgrad school in Monterey) and M. Chris Mason (a retired FSO who worked in Paktika province, is a fellow at the Center for Advanced Defense Studies in Washington), "Democracy in Afghanistan is wishful thinking."

²⁷ August 17, 2009.

²⁸ *The Financial Times*, February 12, 2008, Gideon Rachman, "Too Soon to Give Up in Afghanistan."

²⁹ *The Guardian*, August 18, 2009, Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, "Face to face with the Taliban." He points out that one of the Taliban government locations which he visited was only 500 meters, roughly 600 paces, from a fortified police station.

³⁰ Gilles Dorransoro, Op. cit. "In fact, there have been no splinter groups since its emergence, except locally with no strategic consequences."

³¹ *The Washington Post*, October 9, 2009, Scott Wilson, "Emerging Goal for Afghanistan: Weaken, Not vanquish, Taliban."

³² I have analyzed a dozen insurgencies throughout the world over the last two centuries in my book, *Violent Politics* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008). All exhibit this characteristic.

³³ *The New York Times*, October 11, 2009, Scott Shane: "A Dogged Taliban Chief Rebounds, Vexing U.S."

Mr. Shane quotes Richard Barrett, a former British intelligence officer now monitoring al-Qaida and the Taliban for the United Nations, who argues that Mullah Omar has learned the lesson of 2001. "If the Taliban regains power,' he said, 'they don't want Al Qaeda hanging around.'"

³⁴ *Aljazeera.net*. October 7, 2009. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar said that the 9/11 attack was neither planned in Afghanistan nor carried out by Afghans. "Those who carried it out were people born in the US and Europe and they were trained there. They were not Afghans and they never got training in Afghanistan."

³⁵ *International Herald Tribune*, August 27, 2009, James Risen and Mark Landler, "Karzai's No. 2 puts U.S. in predicament." "...the decision to turn a blind eye to the warlords and drug traffickers...was a fundamental strategic mistake of the Afghan war. It sent a signal to the Afghan people that the most corrupt warlords had the backing of the United States..."

³⁶ *The Nation*, Nov 17, 2008, Tariq Ali, "Operation Enduring Disaster" and *International Herald Tribune*, October 5, 2009, Henry Kissinger, "Afghanistan's cruel options."

³⁷ United States Army Combined Arms Center, Leavenworth, Kansas, Handbook 09-27 April 2009. "Center for Army Lessons Learned." Also see the Department of State, *Counterinsurgency for U.S. Government Policy Makers: A work in Progress*, October 2007, Department of State Publication # 11456.

³⁸ *International Herald Tribune*, Sept 17, 2009, Andrew Wilder [research director at Tufts University Center] "Squandering hearts and minds."

³⁹ Russian ambassador Zamir N. Kabulov pointed out that during their occupation the Russians spent billions on education, building roads, dams and other infrastructure as well as education and programs designed uplift women, "to no avail." See *New York Times*, October 20, 2008, John F. Burns, "An Old Afghanistan Hand Offers Lessons from the Past."

⁴⁰ The latest figures, reported in *The New York Times*, November 15, 2009, David Barboza, "China's Sprint for the Gold," show a U.S. trade deficit of \$422 billion with China holding an amazing \$2.273 trillion in foreign currency, much of it obligations on the United States." The U.S. budget deficit for the fiscal year is estimated at \$1.4 trillion according to Christopher Drew, op. cit.

⁴¹ The U.S. federal debt is now in excess of \$12 trillion of which 7% is now held by China and 6% by Japan. Just servicing the debt now costs \$202 billion; service costs are estimated to increase by 2019 to over \$700 billion which is more than the current combined budgets for education, energy, homeland security and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. *The New York Times*, November 23, 2009, Edmund L. Andrews, "Federal Government Faces Balloon in Debt Payments."

⁴² *The Guardian*, December 14, 2008, Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, op. cit. Mr. Ahad, one of the few foreign reporter who went into insurgent-held territory and met with Taliban leadership. One of the men told him that while he had not approved of the Taliban, the new organization, known as Threki Taliban, "was not the same" as the group that had ruled before.

⁴³ *The New York Times*, January 2, 2009, Dexter Filkins, "Bribes Corrode Afghans' Trust in Government." As Mr. Filkins wrote, "Kept afloat by billions of dollars in American and other foreign aid, the government of Afghanistan is shot through with corruption and graft...Everything seems for sale." The drug traffic reaches into the presidency. See *The International Herald Tribune*, October 6, 2008, James Risen, "Reports link brother of Karzai to drug trade." On police corruption, *The New York Times*, April 9, 2009, Richard A. Opiel, Jr. "Corruption Undercuts Hopes for Afghan police." And on troops and police passing ammunition to the Taliban see *The International Herald Tribune*, May 20, 2009, C.J. Chiver, "In captured Taliban munitions, clues to leaks." Henry Kissinger, a supporter of the war, admits that "Reform...will require decades." *International Herald Tribune*, February 27, 2009, "The Way Forward."

⁴⁴ *The Nation*, October 14, 2009, Tom Hayden, "Kilcullen's Long War." Mr. Hayden says that the plan was hatched in 2005. Also see Bacevich, op. cit. and the British view, as outlined by General Sir David Richards, the newly appointed Chief of the British General Staff, is set out by Sam Marsden, "Afghan mission 'could last 40 years.'" *The Independent*, August 8, 2009.

⁴⁵ As Hermann Göring commented during his trial at Nuremberg in 1945, "...democracy or fascist dictatorship or a parliament or a communist dictatorship...voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being

attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to greater danger. It works the same in any country.”