

# US JOINT FORCES COMMAND MORNING NEWS CLIPS

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## **I. Gen. Mattis' Testimony Before the Senate Armed Services Committee**

### **A. "Mattis: Future Units Need Balanced Capabilities" By Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Carden American Forces Press Service**

Article reports that although many of the U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan are deployed in a mentorship and training role, they're still capable of taking the fight to the enemy, the commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command said Tuesday. Marine Corps Gen. James N. Mattis testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee and explained that such units are still configured to retain combat power, and that their multifaceted capabilities herald the future for the U.S. military. Article mentions USJFCOM.

### **B. "Commander: More NATO Trainers Needed" By John Vandiver Stars and Stripes**

Article reports that U.S. lawmakers expressed frustration Tuesday that NATO countries were not offering more personnel to train the Afghan army. Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee grilled the alliance's top military leader, Adm. James Stavridis, during his visit to Capitol Hill, questioning him about a shortfall of NATO troops to carry out the mission. Stavridis, along with Gen. William E. Ward of U.S. Africa Command and Joint Forces Commander Gen. James Mattis, appeared before the committee for annual testimony on the range of threats facing the country. Article mentions USJFCOM.

## **II. Modeling and Simulation**

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Article reports that Old Dominion University called on an experienced hand to lead its Suffolk-based high-tech incubator, the Virginia Modeling, Analysis and Simulation Center. John Sokolowski, who has worked for the ODU-managed center for nearly a decade and served for the last year as its interim director, was appointed VMASC's executive director, the university officials announced Monday. Article mentions USJFCOM.

## **III. Afghanistan**

### **A. "Gates: Some Troops Could Leave Afghanistan Early" By Anne Gearan Associated Press**

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### **B. "Afghanistan War: Fight For Kandahar Won't Be Like Fight For Marjah" By Gordon Lubold Christian Science Monitor**

Article reports that the operation that American and coalition forces are planning for Kandahar in southern Afghanistan won't look like D-Day, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top commander there, said Tuesday. Fresh off a recent success, so far, in Helmand Province, American military planners are thinking ahead to the next phase of challenging the Taliban in southern Afghanistan: Kandahar. Article does not mention USJFCOM.

### **C. "Man Versus Afghanistan" By Robert D. Kaplan The Atlantic**

Article examines in detail the strategy being used by top commanders in Afghanistan and includes coalition points of view. Article does not mention USJFCOM.

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**Mattis: Future Units Need Balanced Capabilities**  
**By Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Carden**  
**American Forces Press Service**  
**March 9, 2010**

Although many of the U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan are deployed in a mentorship and training role, they're still capable of taking the fight to the enemy, the commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command said Tuesday.

Marine Corps Gen. James N. Mattis testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee and explained that such units are still configured to retain combat power, and that their multifaceted capabilities herald the future for the U.S. military. "The theme that we're seeing more and more now is the troops going in must have the ability to fight in a coalition atmosphere and be able to partner," Mattis said.

He explained that this shift in unit capabilities is part of a larger policy directed by Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, for the entire military. "The entire military force is becoming more attuned to this 'advise and assist' effort, whether it's in Africa, Afghanistan or Iraq," the general said.

The first of the designated advise-and-assist brigades began arriving in Iraq over the summer. They've done well to empower Iraqi security forces and to help ensure the gradual drawdown of U.S. troops, Mattis said.

"When those troops go in, they will focus on the train-and-assist [mission]," he said. "But it would be ill-advised to the enemy to mess with them. They will still have their abilities to fight, and these forces are quite capable of rocking the enemy back on their heels. "The troops are trained and adjusted to the advise-and-assist mission in Iraq, and from our perspective, these troops are exactly the right thing at the right time," Mattis added.

The Iraq model is adaptive, and is being used by U.S. troops in Afghanistan as well, said Mattis, whose command is responsible for providing efficient training programs to combatant commanders.

U.S. forces in Afghanistan are focusing more on improving the capabilities of Afghan soldiers through training and mentorship. Rather than U.S. forces being the sole tip of the spear in combat operations in the volatile south, U.S. and Afghan forces consistently fight side by side, he said.

"I'd go so far as in saying now that the troops that are going into southern Afghanistan are completely capable on their own as combat units or in partnering with the Afghans," Mattis said.

Military officials in Afghanistan's Helmand province estimate that there is one Afghan soldier per every three American troops rooting out Taliban in the Marja offensive. Only months ago, that ratio was estimated at one Afghan soldier for at least 10 Americans.

Mattis explained that the behavior of the U.S. troops in this capacity is just as important as the shift in their capabilities, shining light on the need to expand advisor and mentorship training to all combat units. Units must be organized to have the best-possible components and elements to execute any mission, he said, and must be tailored to provide maximum flexibility to deal with a wide range of conflicts and contingencies.

"While we cannot accurately predict the type of warfare in which we must be ready to engage in the future, we recognize that we cannot adopt a single, preclusive view of war," he said. "Balance is key. We are learning, [and] we've got it right this time. We are using lessons learned to change the very makeup of the unit training."

## **Commander: More NATO Trainers Needed**

**By John Vandiver**

***Stars and Stripes***

**March 10, 2010**

U.S. lawmakers expressed frustration Tuesday that NATO countries were not offering more personnel to train the Afghan army. Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee grilled the alliance's top military leader, Adm. James Stavridis, during his visit to Capitol Hill, questioning him about a shortfall of NATO troops to carry out the mission.

Committee Chairman Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., said the Afghan force is growing faster than the coalition's ability to train them. "NATO members are falling short once again," Levin said. "It's almost unbelievable to me we can't get NATO allies to carry out that [training] commitment."

Stavridis admitted that a recent force-generation conference in Belgium left the alliance short by about 700 trainers. "That is more than disappointing. It is unacceptable," Levin said in his statement.

And with the Dutch poised to pull out their 2,000 troops this year, the actual NATO shortfall will soon be in the range of 2,700, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., noted. "So we're really not on track then," McCain said. "We will continue to hammer away at this until we fulfill this commitment," Stavridis, who also serves as commander of U.S. European Command, told the committee.

Stavridis also faced questions about the performance of Afghan security forces in the volatile southern part of the country. He said there are signs that Afghans are taking on more responsibility, showcased most recently in the ongoing offensive against the Taliban in Helmand province. "I am satisfied with the progress of the Afghan National Army and overall its performance has been effective in Marjah," Stavridis told lawmakers. "We're seeing them in the fight."

Stavridis, along with Gen. William E. Ward of U.S. Africa Command and Joint Forces Commander Gen. James Mattis, appeared before the committee for annual testimony on the range of threats facing the country. Ward told lawmakers that AFRICOM will continue to focus on its main mission: helping African militaries develop more capacity to provide for their own security.

Of particular concern are al-Qaida connected groups in northern and eastern Africa, Ward said. "We certainly see indications of al-Qaeda in Africa," said Ward, who stopped short of saying the terror group is growing in number. But "based on what they are saying, they are seeking to expand their influence."

In response to a question from McCain, about whether AFRICOM should have a headquarters on the continent, Ward said such a move is unnecessary and could bring unwanted negative reactions. "It would be more counterproductive than productive," Ward said. "Many unintended consequences would fall out from that kind of a move."

## **Longtime Employee Will Lead Virginia Modeling, Analysis and Simulation Center**

**By Peter Frost**

***Daily Press***

**March 10, 2010**

Old Dominion University called on an experienced hand to lead its Suffolk-based high-tech incubator, the Virginia Modeling, Analysis and Simulation Center. John Sokolowski, who has worked for the ODU-managed center for nearly a decade and served for the last year as its interim director, was appointed VMASC's executive director, the university officials announced Monday.

Sokolowski, a retired Navy officer who was instrumental in forging a partnership between ODU and U.S. Joint Forces Command's Joint Warfighting Center, replaces Michael McGinnis, who left VMASC in 2009 to lead a technology center at the University of Nebraska. He'll lead the 12-year-old nonprofit center that partners with academia, industry and government on modeling and simulation initiatives as it attempts to broaden its portfolio and raise its national profile.

University and industry officials called Sokolowski a pioneer in the field, having earned the first Ph.D. in modeling and simulation/engineering from ODU's Frank Batten College of Engineering and Technology.

John Dannon, a senior analyst with the Lockheed Martin Center for Innovation, said Sokolowski's "comprehensive vision for VMASC's future and his reputation as a respected researcher ensures that Hampton Roads will remain an international leader in modeling and simulation research."

The center was founded in 1997 and has been closely aligned with the region's military installations, which increasingly depend on high-tech tools to test weapons, defense and communications systems.

VMASC has since reached out to other sectors of the economy like local governments and health-care providers, which are turning to modeling and simulation for a variety of cost-saving and efficiency measures including disaster training, infrastructure planning and classroom instruction. Sokolowski will be charged with continuing to nurture the center's relationship with the military while forging new partnerships to foster growth.

The high-tech effort in Hampton Roads and Virginia requires a partnership among academia, industry, and the military and government, Sokolowski said in a statement. "It takes all three to move ahead in this increasingly important field," he said. "Collaboration is key to addressing the many hard problems that only (modeling and simulation) can help solve."

**Gates: Some Troops Could Leave Afghanistan Early**  
**By Anne Gearan**  
**Associated Press**  
**March 10, 2010**

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates raised the possibility Wednesday that some of the U.S. forces involved in the Afghanistan surge could leave the country before President Barack Obama's announced July 2011 date to begin withdrawal. Without giving specifics, Gates said, "It would have to be conditions-based."

Gates made the remarks during a visit to a dust-blown training ground in Kabul province where Afghan soldiers come for weeks of training under U.S. and British instruction. British Brigadier Simon Levy told Gates that if NATO countries contribute more trainers, the project to expand the Afghan army will keep pace.

The goal is to reach 134,000 trained forces this fall. The Pentagon hopes the Afghans will soon ease the load on U.S. forces. In a press conference with Gates, Afghan Defense Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak said his troops are eager to take on the responsibility for defending the country, but gave no indication of when that might be possible. Gates said, "We will begin that transition no later than July of 2011, but the pace will depend also on conditions on the ground." Still, the Pentagon chief said, "We should not be too impatient."

Gates watched as Afghan troops dealt with a simulated roadside bomb explosion. He stood on an embankment above the road as Afghan soldiers leapt out of a convoy, tended to casualties and contained the explosive. He said he was very impressed by what he saw.

"Although attention may be focused on operations in the south today, the training that is going on in this facility is even more important," he said. "At the end of the day, only Afghans will be able to provide long-term security for Afghanistan." U.S. forces are engaged in a major offensive against Taliban fighters in southern Afghanistan. Gates visited some of those troops Tuesday.

Reporters also asked Gates about Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's announced visit to Afghanistan on Wednesday. "It's certainly bothersome," he said. "We think Afghanistan should have good relations with all its neighbors, but we want all of Afghanistan's neighbors" to deal fairly with President Hamid Karzai's government. Gates has accused Tehran of "playing a double game" in Afghanistan by trying to woo the Afghan government while undermining U.S. and NATO efforts by helping the Taliban.

## **Afghanistan War: Fight For Kandahar Won't Be Like Fight For Marjah**

**By Gordon Lubold**

***Christian Science Monitor***

**March 09, 2010**

The operation that American and coalition forces are planning for Kandahar in southern Afghanistan won't look like D-Day, the top commander there said Tuesday. Fresh off a recent success, so far, in Helmand Province, American military planners are thinking ahead to the next phase of challenging the Taliban in southern Afghanistan: Kandahar. But the fight for Kandahar – described as the New York City of Afghanistan for its cultural, political, and economic significance – is expected to be more measured than the operation in Marjah in Helmand, which was a precision strike that began with the insertion of hundreds of U.S. marines by helicopter.

"There won't be a D-Day that is climactic," said Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top commander there told reporters in Kabul, during a trip in which he escorted Defense Secretary Robert Gates. "It will be a rising tide of security when it comes." The operation in Marjah included about 2,500 marines and 1,500 Afghan soldiers – with as many as 10,000 troops in support. The top Marine commander in Marjah said last week the objective there was to come in "big, strong, and fast, [to] put the enemy on the horns of a dilemma."

By contrast, the mission in Kandahar, expected to begin by summer, will be more gradual. Few details are clear, even in a counterinsurgency in which the NATO command has telegraphed its intentions before starting an operation, such as in Marjah last month. But military officials say Kandahar will require a more nuanced, measured approach in which forces will build up slowly, probably on the outskirts, before entering the city itself perhaps months later.

Kandahar is a much larger city and province, and coalition forces will take their time to enter due to the area's more complex political and tribal nature. McChrystal has had his eye on Kandahar, which the Taliban took over years ago, for a long time. But when he took charge of the mission last year, many American forces were already amassed in Helmand to the west.

While Helmand was a Taliban stronghold and much of the poppy crop that provides financial support for the insurgency grows there, many experts say it is not a strategic prize. Nonetheless, McChrystal mounted his first operation there under the new U.S. strategy (and increased troop strength), as a demonstration of what could be done. Citing the clear-hold-build approach, military officials say that most combat operations are over in Marjah and that it is now in the "hold and build" phase.

That leaves room to begin planning for Kandahar and the districts that surround it, including Zhari, Panjawai, Khakrez, Arghandab, and Dand. Counterinsurgency experts say these outer areas hold the key to success for coalition forces entering Kandahar itself. While not referring to operations in Kandahar specifically, Secretary Gates sought to prepare the military and the American and international community for the likelihood that the next few months will be no cakewalk.

"There is still much fighting ahead, and there will assuredly be more dark days," Gate said at a press conference Tuesday with Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai, in Kabul. But there is reason to be hopeful that Afghan and coalition forces can rout the hardest elements of the Taliban and establish security for the rest of the population, he said. "Looking forward," Gates said, "there are grounds for optimism as our countries pursue what President Karzai has called an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned initiative to ensure peace and stability."

## **Man Versus Afghanistan**

**By Robert D. Kaplan**

*The Atlantic*

April 2010

"We were there to fight, to do PT, to eat, to sleep, then to fight again. There was no big-screen TV or other diversion in the barracks. It was a world of concrete, plywood, and gun oil, and it was absolutely intoxicating in its intensity and unlike anything that existed in the British military." So recollected retired Lieutenant Colonel Richard Williams of the elite British Special Air Service, concerning the worst days in Iraq. In December 2006, Williams told me, there were more than 140 suicide bombings in Baghdad, a level of violence that he likened to the Nazi Blitz on London. In December 2007, there were five. "General McChrystal delivered that statistic," a feat that not even the recent bombings in Baghdad can detract from. In Iraq, he went on, General Stanley A. McChrystal raised the "hard, nasty business" of counterterrorism—of "black ops"—to an industrial scale, with 10 nightly raids throughout the city, 300 a month, that McChrystal, now 55, regularly joined.

Williams did not discount the decisive Sunni Awakening, the surge of 20,000 extra troops into Iraq, or the deployment of troops outside the big Burger King bases and deep into the heart of hostile Iraqi neighborhoods. But he insisted that the work of the special operators commanded by McChrystal was also pivotal.

And, Williams added, there was never any question that they would succeed.

"Doubt," T. E. Lawrence wrote in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926), is "our modern crown of thorns." The Special Operations forces that McChrystal led in Iraq were not so afflicted, despite a home front—especially a policy nomenclature in Washington—that by 2006 had given up on the war. McChrystal, whom Williams called "the singularly most impressive military officer I ever served with," has never submitted to fate. His oft-documented physical regimen—running eight miles a day, eating one meal a day, and sleeping four hours a night—itself expresses an unyielding, almost cultic determination.

Last December, in a spare, homely office in Kabul that felt like the business-class lounge of a bad airline, McChrystal recalled his Iraq experience for me: "I remember"—he pauses—"we had a meeting in Balad [an air base north of Baghdad] in the spring of 2006, where we asked ourselves, 'Have we already lost, and are too stubborn to admit it?' After all, the military is hard-wired to be optimistic, so there is a danger of not being realistic. Well, we decided that we hadn't lost. By then we had [Abu Musab al-] Zarqawi in our sights. We could smell him. We also felt, in those dark days, that we could break and implode alQaeda. We in JSOC [Joint Special Operations Command] had this sense of ... mission, passion ... I don't know what you call it. The insurgents," McChrystal went on, "had a real cause, and we had a counter-cause. We had a level of unit cohesion just like in *The Centurions* and *The Praetorians*," 1960s novels by Jean Lartéguy about French paratroopers in Indochina and Algeria. "It was intense," McChrystal said, scrunching his already deeply carved face. "We were hitting alQaeda in Iraq like Rocky Balboa hitting Apollo Creed in the gut."

I asked whether the situation in Iraq in 2006 was bleaker than Afghanistan now.

"Look, this isn't easy," he sighed. "Afghanistan for years got worse and worse, and the coalition sometimes lagged behind the reality of the situation." Because the country is so decentralized, he explained, it is extraordinarily complex, with a different tribal and sectarian reality in each district. But then he ticked off ways the war could be won. "The insurgency is only fundamentally effective in the Pashtun belt. The critical part of the population is where the water and the roads are. People near water are more important economically: along the Helmand and Kabul rivers. You secure these areas, and you take the oxygen out of the insurgency." He continued, talking about developing a corps of Afghan-area experts within the United States military akin to the American "China hands" of the early and mid-20th century, and "British East India Company types" who went out for years and learned the local languages. His command sergeant major, Mike Hall of Avon Lake, Ohio, said that when McChrystal selected his team of generals and colonels to come with him to command the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan in June 2009, he more or less told them to "get out of the deployment mentality—that they would be in-country for 18 months, two and a half years, for the duration, however long it took to win."

McChrystal believes that the "ideological piece" of alQaeda is "truly scary": that a new brand of totalitarianism—alQaeda the franchise—is running amok and motivating small secretive groups around the world, and that victory in Afghanistan is necessary to deliver a "huge moral defeat" to it.

McChrystal's resolve is part of a larger, deeper story. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has repeatedly employed its military, wisely and unwisely, as a weapon against fate and inevitability. In that capacity, the military has become the principal protagonist in an intellectual debate, raging since antiquity, that pits individual moral responsibility against determinism—the belief that historical, cultural, ethnic, economic, and other antecedent forces determine the future of men and nations. McChrystal, the commander of American and NATO troops in an Afghanistan that is tottering on the edge of chaos, is both the supreme and most recent symbol of that struggle.

The ur-text for a philosophical discussion of the role of the U.S. military in the post-Cold War era is Isaiah Berlin's 1953 Oxford lecture, "Historical Inevitability," in which he condemns as immoral and cowardly the belief that vast impersonal forces such as geography, environment, and ethnic characteristics determine the direction of world politics. Berlin reproaches Arnold Toynbee and Edward Gibbon for seeing "nations" and "civilizations" as "more concrete" than the individuals who embody them, and for seeing abstractions like "tradition" and "history" as "wiser than we."

In the 1990s, the Balkans were a classic case of setting determinists and realists, who were dissuaded from military intervention because of Yugoslavia's often bloody history and its questionable strategic importance, against liberal internationalists and neoconservatives, who favored intervention because they opposed giving Yugoslavia up to fate, especially in light of the Holocaust. My own book, *Balkan Ghosts*, was attacked as deterministic, and was misused as an argument against intervention in 1993, when it first appeared, even as I supported intervention in print and on television. The fact that I wrote a book about a bloody ethnic history and favored intervention was no contradiction: only the most difficult human landscapes require intervention in the first place, and when one does intervene militarily, one should always do so without illusions. Winston Churchill's geographical and cultural portrait of Sudan in *The River War* (1899), which was next on McChrystal's reading list when I saw him, is full of determinism, yet Churchill nevertheless favored intervention there.

The Balkan interventions, however belated, stopped the ethnic cleansing, did not lead to military quagmires, paid strategic dividends, and in so doing appeared to justify the idealistic approach to foreign policy. Indeed, the 1995 humanitarian intervention in Bosnia changed the debate from "Should NATO exist?" to "Should NATO expand?" Our 1999 war in Kosovo, as much as the attacks of September 11, 2001, allowed for the expansion of NATO to the Black Sea. It also led to the toppling of the Yugoslav strongman Slobodan Milošević. In the aftermath, realists and determinists seemed vanquished; to be called either one back then was practically an insult.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq, to which I subscribed, had Balkan antecedents. In fact, some intellectuals agitating for intervention in the Balkans had earlier railed against President George H. W. Bush for not sending U.S. troops the extra few hundred kilometers to Baghdad in 1991 to depose Saddam Hussein. For those Gulf War idealists, finishing the job in Iraq against a regime that had killed, directly and indirectly, several times more people than would Milošević's, was in keeping with the Balkan passions of the era. In 2003, the idea of regime change in Iraq appealed to those willing to do anything to defeat the deterministic forces of geography and ethnic and sectarian differences, and to those who thought that the American military power evident in the Balkans, particularly air power, had rendered such forces moot, paving the way for universalist ideas to triumph over terrain and history.

So what began in the mid-1990s with a limited, American-dominated air-and-land campaign in the western, most-developed part of the former Ottoman Empire led less than a decade later to a mass infantry invasion in its eastern, least-developed part. In March 2004, I found myself in Camp Udairi, in the midst of the Kuwaiti desert. I had embedded with a Marine battalion that, along with the rest of the First Marine Division, was about to begin the overland journey to Baghdad and western Iraq, replacing the Army's 82nd Airborne Division there. Lines of seven-ton trucks and Humvees stretched across the horizon, all headed north. A sandstorm had erupted. An icy wind was blowing. Rain threatened. Vehicles broke down. And we hadn't even begun the several-hundred-kilometer journey to Baghdad that, a few short years earlier, had been dismissed as easy to accomplish by those who thought of toppling Saddam Hussein as merely an extension of toppling Slobodan Milošević. In that environment, only a fool would suggest that deterministic elements like geography no longer mattered.

And on February 22, 2006, when Sunni alQaeda extremists blew up the Shiite alAskari Mosque at Samarra and unleashed a fury of intercommunal atrocities, American troops seemed powerless before primordial hatreds. The myth of an omnipotent U.S. military—born in the Gulf War, battered in Somalia, then repaired and burnished in Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo—was for the moment undone, along with the idealism that went with it. Ethnic and sectarian differences in far-off corners of the world, seen in the 1990s as obstacles that good men should strive to overcome, now loomed as factors that should have warned us away from military action.

The debate does not end there. In late 2006 and early 2007, as Iraq was crumbling and ethnic atrocities reached Balkan dimensions and threatened to rise to those of Rwanda, much of the Washington establishment, especially the realists, called for scaling back or withdrawing our military mission. President George W. Bush did the opposite. He did not succumb to fate. Those supporting him were few, but they included neoconservatives, who essentially argued that human agency—more troops and a new strategy—could triumph over vast impersonal forces, in this case those of sectarian madness. Part of that new strategy, which worked beyond all expectations, was, as we know, McChrystal's industrial-level approach to counterterrorism. Yet that is not to say the struggle against fate in Iraq was worth it. The ultimate cost—in more than 100,000 American and Iraqi lives (and perhaps many more), more than a trillion taxpayer dollars, and untold amounts of squandered diplomatic capital—is a strong argument in favor of less zeal and more determinism. Some may say that President Bush could have changed his strategy and his generals earlier than he did and incurred fewer casualties as a result. But one can play the counterfactual game to no end, and still be stuck with how the war has actually turned out.

To treat every country as an empty slate full of hopeful possibilities is risky: what is doable in one place may not be in another. As the philosopher Raymond Aron suggests, we must pursue an ethic rooted in a hesitant determinism. We need to recognize obvious developmental differences between peoples and regions, but not oversimplify, and leave our options open. We cannot in every instance struggle unconditionally against fate, even though we have a military that will do so if so ordered.

And thus we confront Afghanistan: a country whose citizens have a life expectancy of 44 years and a literacy rate of 28 percent (far lower among women), and only a fifth of whose population has access to clean drinking water. Out of 182 countries, Afghanistan ranks next to last on the United Nations' Human Development Index (just ahead of Niger). Iraq, on the eve of the U.S. invasion, was ranked 126th; its literacy rate hovered around 70 percent. Afghanistan's problems on a developmental level are not only more profound than Iraq's, but vaster in scope, as Afghanistan encompasses 30 percent more land. Consider, also, that 77 percent of Iraqis live in urban areas (concentrated heavily in Baghdad), so reducing violence in Greater Baghdad had a calming effect on the entire country; in Afghanistan, urbanization stands at only 30 percent, and so counterinsurgency efforts in one village may have no effect on another.

Moreover, whereas Mesopotamia, with large urban clusters across a flat landscape, is conducive to military occupation, Afghanistan is, in geographical terms, hard to even hold together. Cathedral-like mountain ranges help seal divisions between Pashtuns and Tajiks and other minorities, even as comparatively few natural impediments separate Afghanistan from Pakistan, or from Iran. Looking at a relief map, one could easily construct a country called Pashtunistan—home to the world's 52 million Pashtuns—lying between the Hindu Kush mountains and the Indus River and overlapping with the Afghan-Pakistani frontier. The Afghanistan-Pakistan border is in reality no border at all but, in the words of Sugata Bose, a Harvard historian, "the heart ... of an expansive Indo-Persian and Indo-Islamic economic, cultural, and political domain that [has] straddled Afghanistan and Punjab for two millennia."

Afghanistan emerged as a country of sorts only in the mid-18th century, and a case can be made that with the slow-motion dissolution of the former Soviet empire in Central Asia, and the gradual weakening of the Pakistani state, a historic realignment is now taking place that could see Afghanistan disappear on the political map: in the future, for example, the Hindu Kush could form a border between Pashtunistan and a Greater Tajikistan. The Taliban—the twisted result of Pashtun nationalism, Islamic fervor, drug money, corrupt warlords, and, now, hatred of the American occupation—may be, in the view of Selig Harrison, the director of the Asia Program at the Center for International Policy, merely the vehicle for a grand transition that a foreign military run by impatient civilians back in Washington can do little to deter.

Yet another reality points to an entirely different conclusion. The dispersal of Afghanistan's larger population over greater territory than Iraq's is basically meaningless, British Army Major General Colin Boag told me: because 65 percent of the population lives within 35 miles of the main road system, which approximates the old medieval caravan routes, only 80 out of 342 districts are really key to military success. Afghanistan is not some barbaric back-of-beyond, but the heart of a cultural continuum connecting the cosmopolitan centers of Persia and India. In fact, Afghanistan has been governed from the center since the 18th century: Kabul, if not always a point of authority, has been at least a point of arbitration. Especially between the early 1930s and the early 1970s, Afghanistan experienced moderate and constructive government under the constitutional monarchy of Zahir Shah. A highway system on which it was safe to travel united the major cities, while estimable health and development programs were on the verge of eradicating malaria. Toward the end of this period, I hitchhiked and rode buses across Afghanistan. I never felt threatened, and I was able to send books and clothes back home through functioning post offices.

There was, too, a strong Afghan national identity distinct from that of Iran or Pakistan or the Soviet Union. Pashtunistan might be a real enough geographic construct, but so, very definitely, is Afghanistan. As Ismail Akbar, a writer and analyst in Kabul, told me: "Thirty years of war and Pakistani interference have weakened Afghan national identity from the heights of the Zahir Shah period. But even the mujahideen civil war of the early 1990s, in which the groups were split along ethnic lines, could not break up Afghanistan. And if that couldn't, nothing will."

Afghans were so desperate for a reunited country after the internecine fighting of the mujahideen era that they welcomed the Taliban in Kandahar in 1994 and in Kabul in 1996, as a bulwark

against anarchy and dissolution. Afghanistan, frail and battered over the years, is nevertheless surprisingly sturdy as a concept and as a cynosure of identity.

Stanley McChrystal's job is to serve as the *deus ex machina* for the rebirth of that modestly well-functioning mid-20th-century Afghan state, and for Afghanistan's fade-out from the front pages—the definition of victory in our imperfect world. McChrystal, the hybrid product of the übermacho Rangers and Special Forces subcultures within the U.S. Army, is now the philosopher's weapon against those vast impersonal forces of history and geography, and, I might add, the agent of deliverance from our post-9/11 mistakes in Afghanistan. Because by our own disastrous actions—by our own agency, in other words—we ourselves, in a process Tolstoy explains well in *War and Peace*, have helped contribute to fate. Not that McChrystal sees himself as fitting into the "great man" theory of history—another form of determinism, it can be argued. He told me that he merely sees opportunities where others don't.

"Afghanistan was a cakewalk in 2001 and 2002," says Sarah Chayes, former special adviser to McChrystal's headquarters. "We started out with a country that hated the Taliban and by 2009 were driving people back into the arms of the Taliban. That's not fate. That's poor policy." We enabled an administration, led by Hamid Karzai, that is less a government than a protection racket, in which bribery is the basis of a whole chain of transactions, from small sums paid to criminals at roadblocks in the south of the country to tens of millions of dollars smuggled out of the Kabul airport by government ministers. The myth is that the absence of governance in Afghanistan creates a vacuum in which the Taliban thrive. But the truth, as Chayes explains, is the opposite. Karzai governs everywhere in the revenue belt, synonymous with Pashtunistan, in the south and east of the country: the Taliban succeed in these very places, not because of no governance but because of corrupt and abusive governance.

Referring to the evolution of the former mujahideen commanders into gangster-oligarchs under Karzai, an Afghan analyst, Walid Tamim, told me: "Warlords like Rabbani, Fahim, Sayyaf, and Dostum have all been empowered by Karzai and the U.S. government. Why is [Taliban leader] Mullah Omar any worse than these guys?" Ashraf Ghani, the country's finance minister from 2002 to 2004, explained: "The core threat we all face is the Afghan government itself. About two-thirds of revenue is lost to abuse. This isn't like corruption in Indonesia, where money is stolen but things still get built; here it is all looted, because the warlords are insecure about what may come next in Afghan politics." Even as American officers talk publicly in bland clichés about partnering with and improving the performance of the Karzai government, the grim reality of Afghan public life is distinguished by corruption, criminality, and poverty.

I knew and wrote about Karzai in the 1980s, when he was a representative in Peshawar of the pro-Western mujahideen faction of Sibghatullah Mojaddedi. Mojaddedi had very little military presence inside Afghanistan; he and Karzai were no threat to anybody. Karzai had impressed me as personable, enlightened, sensitive, and, now that I think about it over the distance of time, weak. I genuinely liked him. But alas, he is said to be bored by actual governance. As Ghani points out, "He is not an organization man with the requisite management abilities," and thus he lacks the skill to build a popular power base like the one the late Afghan Communist leader Babrak Karmal was able to build in the late 1970s and early 1980s, or even like the one the Soviet puppet Najibullah built later on. And without a power base of his own, and with the Americans distracted since 2003 by Iraq, Karzai has had few others to rely on but the warlords and his own knee-deep-in-graft family.

The Soviets may have been occupiers, but they were truly interested in Afghan governance in terms of the advice they gave and the puppets they chose—unlike the United States, obsessed as we have been with hunting alQaeda. Karzai is "unsalvageable," according to a senior Western official I talked to. Moreover, Afghanistan is so "broken and shattered," as he put it, with no human capital to staff the ministries, and with the worst accretion of bureaucratic habits from the Soviet, mujahideen, and Taliban eras, that if this were the 1920s, Afghanistan, with all its history of unruly independence, would be an obvious candidate for trusteeship, with a great Western

power being granted a mandate for it. But this is the early 21st century, and so we have to accept the myth of Afghan sovereignty. Thus, our imperial-like burden is coupled with the absurd (by 1920s standards) task of showing demonstrable results by the planned drawdown in 15 months, in order to legitimize what will be, in effect, a long-term trusteeship.

To accomplish this gargantuan mission, we have stood up the doctrine of counterinsurgency, the rough military equivalent of liberal internationalism, moral interventionism, and nation-building rolled into one. Counterinsurgency's core goal is to protect and nurture the civilian population—the center of gravity in postmodern war—and psychologically and physically separate it from the insurgents. Culturally sensitive troops build schools and dig wells for the villagers, even as they train and mentor local forces to fight the enemy, and strive to monopolize the use of force in a given space.

Counterinsurgency is not new to the U.S. military—indeed, it dates back at least to the Philippine War more than a century ago—but its lessons were repeatedly forgotten by the U.S. Army over the course of the 20th century. To make sure that doesn't happen again, the Army and Marines cooperated on a Counterinsurgency Field Manual, published three years ago. Remarkably, its introduction was written by a former director of Harvard's Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Sarah Sewall. In it, she notes that the manual "challenges much of what is holy about the American way of war," for it directs U.S. forces to "make securing the civilian, rather than destroying the enemy, their top priority." But what is the counterinsurgent to do, given that in an era of total war as waged by radical Islamists, distinguishing between combatant and noncombatant is often impossible? The answer, according to Sewall, is to "assume more risk."

In order to be a more effective weapon of war, American ground forces are therefore becoming more like armed relief workers. They will still train to kill, they will continue to kill in counterterrorism operations, and they will be prepared to kill in more-traditional kinds of interstate war that might erupt in the course of the new century. For the moment, however, American troops will incur more casualties in the service of idealist interventionism, in a place far less developed than either the Balkans or Iraq.

But just as some liberal idealists supported intervention in the Balkans but opposed it in Iraq (correctly, as it turned out), some liberal idealists are skeptical of the mission in Afghanistan. Probably the most incisive critique of U.S. strategy in Afghanistan was written by Rory Stewart last July in the *London Review of Books*. Stewart is the former director of Harvard's Carr Center and a prospective Conservative parliamentary candidate in the United Kingdom. He has run a nongovernmental organization in Kabul, and is the author of the masterful travel work *The Places in Between* (2004), about walking across Afghanistan. He is both a humanitarian and an Afghanistan expert. Yet he feels that the professed U.S. mission in Afghanistan, which assumes counterinsurgency as a "moral obligation," is itself a form of determinism: we automatically assume a solution in a wickedly diverse and complicated country where no solution of the kind we foresee is likely to be had. As he put it,

There are no mass political parties in Afghanistan and the Kabul government lacks the base, strength or legitimacy of the Baghdad government. Afghan tribal groups lack the coherence of the Iraqi Sunni tribes and their relation to state structures ... Afghans are weary of war but the Afghan chiefs are not approaching us, seeking a deal. Since the political players and state structures in Afghanistan are much more fragile than those in Iraq, they are less likely to play a strong role in ending the insurgency.

Meanwhile, Stewart goes on, "the Taliban can exploit the ideology of religious resistance that the West deliberately fostered in the 1980s to defeat the Russians." But at the same time, he says, the ethnic-Pashtun Taliban are unpopular, even as the ethnic-Hazara, -Tajik, and -Uzbek populations are wealthier and more powerful than they were in the 1990s and will resist Taliban attempts to take over their areas. Even if the Taliban did overrun a major city, they are unlikely to repeat the mistake of the 1990s and shelter al-Qaeda. In short, the Taliban are neither as easily

defeated nor as dangerous as we like to think. Forget about state-building or counterinsurgency, he implies, which remains "the irresistible illusion."

McChrystal and his team are burdened by Stewart's misgivings. Contemplating failure for a moment, McChrystal told me, "We'll know it when we won't be able to move our troops around." McChrystal had Stewart to dinner to talk about his article. "He's got a different point of view," McChrystal said, uncharacteristically struggling for words. "I just think that Afghanistan has been a country and that the pieces can be put in place to make it work."

"Look," said Sir Graeme Lamb, a former British Special Air Service commander and McChrystal adviser, "we don't have a grand design [as Stewart thinks]. We've been doing this kind of thing in Iraq, the Balkans, Northern Ireland, Africa, and other places for a long time, and we're comfortable in these thresholds of complexity and chaos. We're the men 'in the arena,' to take a line from Theodore Roosevelt. We will adjust the positions of authority on the battlefield in 2010 so that good things can naturally emerge."

Furthermore, McChrystal's team has problems with Stewart's analysis. Major General Michael Flynn, McChrystal's intelligence chief, views the Taliban less benignly:

"Like the rest of us," Flynn told me, "Mullah Omar is a decade older and wiser than he was on 9/11. He has restructured his political organization to give it more staying power, if in fact it gets back into power. In the meantime, they are killing us with IEDs [improvised explosive devices] the way the mujahideen killed the Soviets with our Stinger missiles. This is a vastly harder enemy than in 2001. They're better than even the Eritreans were [in the 1970s and 1980s]. They absolutely know insurgency doctrine and are spread throughout the country, including the north, in order to disperse us, which they are succeeding at." Unlike Stewart, Flynn believes that if we left Afghanistan, the Taliban might well be able to triumph over non-Pashtun groups.

Not only are McChrystal and his team determined to battle against fate in the form of the Taliban, but they do so in the firm belief that they will get Afghanistan onto the crooked and murky path of development. "We know what success tastes like, from Iraq; we're a team that has won national championships," declared Flynn, who was with McChrystal in JSOC. In *The Story of the Malakand Field Force (1898)*, about the struggle to stabilize what is today the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderland, Winston Churchill posits that a great nation has three choices: to turn a country like Afghanistan into a replica of British parliamentary democracy, which he says is clearly impossible; to withdraw completely, which he says is also impossible; or to work with the tribes and the material at hand through a variety of means. McChrystal, who told me he was halfway through the book, agreed that the third choice—Churchill's choice—is really the only one we have.

What does it mean to work with the tribes, Churchill-style; what does it take to overcome the geographical and human terrain here? The story of Colonel Chris Kolenda, of Omaha, Nebraska, is instructive. Kolenda, a West Point graduate with the sharp-eyed, comforting manner of a family physician, commanded the 1st Squadron of the 91st Cavalry from May 2007 to July 2008 in northeastern Afghanistan, on the border with Pakistan. When Kolenda's 800-soldier battalion arrived, armed violence was endemic. Coalition headquarters in Kabul blamed a Pakistan-based insurgency. "The conventional wisdom was wrong," Kolenda told me. "Almost all of the insurgents were locals who fought for a whole variety of reasons: they were disgusted with ISAF, as well as the government in Kabul; their fathers had fought the Soviets and now the sons were fighting the new foreigners."

Then there was the "psychodrama of interethnic and clan frictions," abetted by the fractured mountainous landscape. The area was populated by Nuristanis, Kohistanis, and Pashtuns, all of whom harbored disdain for the Gujars, migrant farm workers from over the border, who, in their eyes, were "not real Afghans." (So much for the argument that there is no Afghan national identity.) The Nuristanis, in turn, were divided into the Kata, Kom, Kushtowz, and Wai clans. The

Kom were split into hostile and well-armed groups whose current divisions stemmed from the war against the Soviets in the 1980s, when some of the Kom backed the radical forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, known as the HIG, or Hezb-i-Islami-Gulbuddin, and other Kom sub-clans were loyal to the moderate National Islamic Front of Afghanistan. The Kata, meanwhile, were generally loyal to the Lashkar-e-Taiba ("Army of the Righteous"), which carried out major attacks against India from bases in Pakistan. The Pashtuns themselves were divided in some cases, on account of blood feuds, into five elements.

Kolenda apologized to me for "getting down in the weeds," but explained that until he'd learned who was who, and who was fighting whom, his battalion couldn't make progress and escape the cycle of ferocious firefights that had characterized the first three months of its deployment. "People were often giving us tips about bad guys who weren't really bad guys, but simply people from another faction with whom the tipster had a score to settle."

Overlying all of these divisions was a society atomized by three decades of warfare: indeed, because of Afghanistan's short life expectancy, most people in Kolenda's area of responsibility had known nothing but fighting all their lives. The landed aristocracy of elders that once functioned as the social glue had dissolved; in its place came a violent lower class of young men, disaggregated by clan and ethnicity, battling for a hazy idea of justice. The Taliban had been gone from power for seven years. The 17-year-old fighters here barely remembered their benighted rule, and now saw anti-government groups as the good guys against the foreign occupiers.

Finding the right elders and providing them with seed money that would help them regain control of their young men was painstaking labor. You couldn't just build a school or dig a well: a new school in one valley could enrage people in the next. Money was often doled out only after violence by the locals stopped. "Then they built the school," Kolenda said, repeating an Afghan proverb: "If you sweat for it, you'll protect it."

With a little peace and development, the hard core of the hydra-headed insurgency, including elements of the HIG and the Taliban, could no longer hide in plain sight, and "we nailed them," Kolenda said. You couldn't afford to lose one firefight. Yet when you were not eyes-on-target, you had to show restraint. Kolenda told me about one junior noncommissioned officer who made sure his soldiers did not step on a farmer's field once they had spread out on open ground. This sounds easy, but such mundane yet critical actions go completely against the grain of high-testosterone young soldiers bred on hunting and chewing tobacco and wanting to be an Army ranger all their lives in order to fight.

By the time Kolenda's battalion was redeployed out of Kunar and Nuristan, violence had dropped by 90 percent. His battalion didn't need a Dairy Queen or other amenities to keep their spirits up. As Sergeant Major Mike Hall told me, "If you're down-range and focused, time goes fast. That is what good morale is all about."

The measures that Kolenda told me about were not the gold standard. They were merely the minimum required to overcome the forces of geography and history; and they had to be replicated throughout southern and eastern Afghanistan, where each battalion encountered a different mix of clan and sub-clan rivalries.

The coordination of more than a score of such battalions, not to mention 45 Army Special Forces A-teams, Marine special-ops units, and so on, all involved in some aspect of counterinsurgency, is less the job of McChrystal than that of Lieutenant General David M. Rodriguez, like McChrystal and Kolenda a West Point graduate, who heads the ISAF Joint Command. If the military coalition in Afghanistan were a newspaper, think of McChrystal as the editor in chief and Rodriguez as the managing editor. McChrystal, atop ISAF, is, as he said, focused "up and out," dealing with big-think strategic planning, daily interactions with NATO and other members of the 44-country coalition in Afghanistan, the United Nations, the Afghan National Army and National Police,

President Karzai, and the ministers of interior and defense, as well as with training indigenous forces and restructuring detainee procedures—that is, exploiting captured Taliban sources, while not mistreating them, and gradually getting America out of the detainee business altogether. Above all, McChrystal has the task of military coordination with Pakistan in the hunt for high-value targets in the borderlands.

Rodriguez, meanwhile, is focused "down and in," on the day-to-day operations of ISAF, on the deputies of the relevant ministries, the district governors, provincial councils, border police, individual Afghan army units, and so on. Rodriguez, a six-foot-four-inch, gangly, gentle giant with a shock of short salt-and-pepper hair, is the real implementer of President Obama and McChrystal's counterinsurgency strategy.

The shame is that Rodriguez's three-star command didn't even come into existence until late 2009: before that, previous commanders such as Generals David McKiernan and Dan McNeill had to combine the two jobs. As a result, neither job got done as well as it should have. Given the demands of both positions, McChrystal isn't the only one who sleeps just four hours a night; the same could be said for Rodriguez, and for Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry. Flying to Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif with Eikenberry and Rodriguez, respectively, I noticed how they sleep on planes because they essentially have two back-to-back workdays in each 24-hour period: the line-up of briefings and meetings all day long and the tsunami of emails that arrive after dark once Washington, nine and a half hours behind, gets to work.

Rodriguez flew up to Mazar-e-Sharif to listen to Afghan security forces report on what they had been doing for the past few months. In his quiet, unassuming manner, Rodriguez relentlessly questioned the Afghan officers about the Taliban's shadow governments and justice system, the integration of local militias into the security forces, improvements on the ring road connecting Mazar-e-Sharif with Herat in the west and Kabul in the east, and the threat level in Kunduz and Baghlan. The Afghans responded with briefs about the extortion of farmers by the HIG in Baghlan and by the Taliban in Kunduz, and about how the enemy was able to attack highways and supply lines coming from Central Asia and erect an alternative tax system, even though it had no permanent bases. Because of problems with translation from Dari to English, the meeting went on for hours.

"This process is slow and painful," Rodriguez admitted to me afterward. "If we did everything ourselves, it would be quicker, but we wouldn't leave a legacy. Because the Afghans are deeply involved in all these operations, they own it. For a Soviet-inspired army to talk about rural redevelopment as they did in that meeting is an incredible thing." Rodriguez told me he constantly flies around to the regional commands for such briefs, bringing with him a train of high-ranking American and Afghan officers and Kabul ministry officials. On this trip, Rodriguez immersed himself with two key Afghans: army Chief of Staff Bismullah Khan and Lieutenant General Sher Mohammad Karimi, head of army operations. (Karimi is from Khost, by the Pakistan border, the lair of the insurgent leader Jalaluddin Haqqani, and so for very personal reasons, he wants Haqqani "eliminated.")

The idea is to put the American and Afghan military leaders, as well as low-ranking commanders, down-range together socially, and create a flat, fast organization. As with a similar effort in Iraq, top-down guidance from high-ranking officers gets bottom-up refinement from captains and sergeants. To wit, Rodriguez's operations center is a vast hangar-like building with no walls or partitions, very much evoking a newsroom environment. "It is an atmosphere in which you error towards sharing what you know," said Navy Commander Jeff Eggers, a McChrystal adviser.

"I learned at JSOC," McChrystal explained, "that any complex task is best approached by flattening hierarchies. It gets everybody feeling like they're in the inner circle, so that they develop a sense of ownership. The more people who believe that they are part of the team and are in the know, the more you don't have to do it yourself." As Brigadier General Scott Miller, who runs the Afghanistan-Pakistan Coordination Cell at the Pentagon, told me about McChrystal and

Rodriguez's philosophy: "Decentralize until you're uncomfortable, then scrutinize, fix, and push down and out even further, to the level of the sergeants." Precisely because of the commander's ability to reach down to the junior noncommissioned officers, a flat military organization puts—in the words of one admiral I interviewed—"performance pressure on everybody."

This show of organizational dynamism points to a ground truth: despite the awful toll of casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the near-breaking of the Army through the strain on soldiers and their families because of long and dangerous deployments, American ground troops are emerging nearly a decade after 9/11 as a force that is even more organizationally and intellectually formidable than it was after the Berlin Wall collapsed, when the United States was the lone superpower. Army and Marine Corps company commanders, for example, can lead in a conventional fight and, as Kolenda's experience showed, also bring order to chaotic tribal and ethnic messes, all while they communicate effectively up the bureaucratic chain (a skill they began to hone before 9/11, in the Balkans). And these officers have mastered what is, in fact, the colonial technique of partnering with indigenous forces molded in their own image. Rodriguez's command is a culmination of this whole experience.

But the very dominance of the U.S. military can lead to a dangerous delusion. For the time being, the American media and policy elite are focused on whether U.S. forces can achieve substantial results in 15 months, even though it is a truism of counterinsurgency that there are few shortcuts to victory and you shouldn't rush to failure. Nevertheless, U.S. forces quite possibly will have quelled some significant part of the anarchy in southern Afghanistan by then: this is the sort of challenge our troops have become expert in. Yet that might only lead to mistaking artificial progress for lasting governance. The very prospect of some success by July 2011 increases the likelihood that U.S. forces will be in Afghanistan in substantial numbers for years. In effect, the proficiency of the American military causes it to be overextended. British Major General Richard Barrons, a veteran of the Balkans and Iraq now serving in Afghanistan, told me he learned during the most depressing days in Baghdad that "the long view is the primary weapon against fate." If you are willing to stay, you can turn any situation around for the good. But that is an imperial mind-set, with its assumption of a near-permanent presence, which today's Washington cannot abide, even as its own strategy drives toward that outcome.

At the core of a withdrawal strategy is the building of the Afghan army and police force. In charge of this effort is Lieutenant General William B. Caldwell, who, like McChrystal and Rodriguez, is a 1976 graduate of West Point, and like them was transformed by the "band of brothers" belief system forged in Iraq. There, as a spokesman, Caldwell "saw us go from the depths of despair to 'this is going to work.'" He added, "I have a young family, and this will be the third of five Christmases I will be away from them. I did not have to be here, but I absolutely believe in this mission with Stan."

I challenged Caldwell about reports of 90 percent illiteracy in the Afghan security forces. He answered: "The recruits may not know how to read, but they are incredibly street-smart. They're survivalists. Basic soldiering here does not require literacy. We give them a course in how to read and issue them pens afterwards. They take tremendous pride in that. In Afghanistan, a pen in a shirt pocket is a sign of literacy. We're three or four years behind Iraq in building an army, but if the ground situation improves, like in Iraq, political and media pressure will dissipate, and that will buy time."

A deal with the insurgents constitutes another part of a withdrawal strategy. While becoming more organizationally formidable since 9/11, the Taliban have also modified their behavior. Mullah Omar has sent out a directive banning beheadings and unauthorized kidnappings as well as other forms of violent and criminal activity, according to both Al-Jazeera and ISAF officials. "In a way, we're seeing a kinder, gentler Taliban," said both Commander Eggers and General Flynn. Moreover, in working with the tribes in the spirit of Churchill's Malakand Field Force, Flynn, the intelligence chief, went so far as to suggest that the insurgent leaders Jalaluddin Haqqani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar are both "absolutely salvageable." "The HIG already have members in

Karzai's government, and it could evolve into a political party, even though Hekmatyar may be providing alQaeda leaders refuge in Kunar. Hekmatyar has reconcilable ambitions. As for the Haqqani network, I can tell you they are tired of fighting, but are not about to give up. They have lucrative business interests to protect: the road traffic from the Afghanistan-Pakistan border to Central Asia." Lamb, the former SAS commander, added: "Haqqani and Hekmatyar are pragmatists tied to the probability of outcomes. With all the talk of Islamic ideology, this is the land of the deal."

Again, the resemblance to the 1980s is telling, with leading anti-Soviet combatants like Haqqani and Hekmatyar central to the military equation, and a partially irrelevant Karzai: today ISAF officials talk quietly about working around Karzai by dealing directly with the ministries of interior and defense, and with the offices of the provincial governors, all of which they are fortifying with Western advisers.

The possibility of reaching an accommodation with some insurgents against others, as elusive as it may be, suggests how nonlinear the future is, and how deterministic a linear perspective can be. As in Iraq, surprises lie in store, and they might even be good ones: in so many places in Afghanistan, I saw the raw potential of this country. Despite a deadly, intimidating geography of steep and icy peaks that seem to stretch into infinity when seen from the air, in Afghanistan's cities I encountered many an intellectual in a cold room with boxy furniture, passionately seeking to move beyond ethnic politics to a democratic, liberal universalism. They reminded me of the civil-society types I had met in Eastern Europe during the Cold War, in cities that, like Kabul, stank of lignite in winter. Then there was Herat, an old Silk Road nexus in western Afghanistan, which, despite 30 years of war, had changed remarkably for the better since I had last seen it, as a backpacker in 1973. Back then it was a ramshackle, Wild West town with barely a paved road. Now it is a sprawling, bustling city with malls, on the same level of development as many places in central Turkey that I knew from the 1980s: an improvement replicated in Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad, and other urban areas here, with Kandahar being the striking exception. "Despite 30 years of war," McChrystal said, in his office, rubbing his eyes from lack of sleep, "civilization grows here like weeds."

Now the American military is about to bear down hard on Greater Kandahar, where Taliban- and Karzai-affiliated warlords hold considerable sway. "We will get to about 33 percent of the Afghan landmass in the next 15 months or so, affecting 60 percent of the population," Rodriguez assured me. Once again, we might be poised to overcome the vast, impersonal forces of fate, even as we contribute to our own troubled destiny as a great power.