

New World Strategies Coalition, Inc.

Restoring the Tribal Balance

An Indigenous Solution for Peace in Afghanistan

NWSC INC.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

President Barack Obama doesn't have a viable Afghanistan exit strategy due to a fatal flaw in America's policy development process, which has been, namely, a complete lack of input from native Afghans. Because there is only one solution for peace in Afghanistan – and it is an Afghan solution.

The New World Strategies Coalition (NWSC) has the inimitable ability to gather feedback directly from tribal elders of well-respected clans in Afghanistan and, as a result, can channel the will of the Afghan people. The purpose of this white paper is not to specify a political solution but a process that will empower this “Silent Majority” so that Afghans can, finally, choose their own destiny.

Afghanistan experienced forty years of peace under King Zahir Shah during an era that began in the early 1930s. That type of society seems like ancient folklore in light of today's conditions, because after 30 years of incessant war Afghanistan is now one of the most violent, corrupt and poverty-stricken places on earth.

The last time the Afghan nation saw anything that resembled stability was when its indigenous tribal structure was fully intact and a national unifying monarch sat on the throne - two essential factors that helped maintain the “tribal balance”.

The turmoil we see today is a direct result of foreign intervention that weakened the tribal balance, which can be broken down into the following periods: Soviet Occupation (1979 – 1989); Afghan Civil Wars (1989 – 1994); Taliban Reign (1994 – 2001) and NATO Occupation (2001 – 2010).

General David Petraeus's COIN strategy is designed for failure because of the stratospheric odds against winning Afghan hearts and minds primarily because the U.S. is aligned with a perceived corrupt and illegitimate puppet government in Kabul.

Also, Afghanistan, with its tribal society and weak tradition of loyalty to the state, is not a promising place for a classic counterinsurgency operation. Its twin goals of protecting the population and guiding the Afghan security forces toward self-sufficiency are inconsistent with Afghanistan's history, culture, and society.

If the root cause of the current dilemma is tribal imbalance, the obvious answer should be to reinstate this equilibrium. Thus, the NWSC is proposing a series of “*All-Afghan Jirgas*” be assembled to accomplish this mission. A total of three rounds of *jirgas* will be held to design and implement the solution – two meetings in neutral countries and the finale in Kandahar to announce the new government and head of state.

Other issues must still be addressed including neutralizing Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and addressing the drug trade. The next step would be to establish an independent commission of Afghan natives who would handle the logistics of the *jirgas* and act as a liaison between the delegates and the U.S. government.

INTRODUCTION

President Barack Obama wants an Afghanistan exit strategy – and he wants it now. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be a viable solution on the table that will stabilize Afghanistan in the least or serve America's national security interests.

*You can take an Afghan to
Hell with Kindness,
but not to Heaven by force*

- Afghan Proverb

Some of the alternatives bandied about by senior administration officials are, unfortunately, formulas for state collapse - including the continuance of a 10-year-old failed counterinsurgency strategy, a Special Operations and C.I.A. drone war and a power-sharing solution that would divvy up the country amongst corrupt Afghan government officials, violent Islamic fundamentalists, *mujahideen* warlords and various other maligned actors. A recent argument for a de facto partition of Afghanistan, recently brought to the debate by Robert Blackwill, a former policy advisor to both presidents Bush, would condemn the region to an endless ethnic conflict.

The fatal flaw in the Afghanistan policy development process has been the complete lack of input from the Afghan people - the stakeholders with the most to lose. The best-laid plans of global powers have failed miserably over the past three decades, and it is time for the U.S. and international community to come to the realization that there is only one solution for peace in Afghanistan – and it is an Afghan solution.

The aim of this document is to give Mr. Obama his exit strategy. The U.S. does not have to choose between President Hamid Karzai's reprobate regime and the Taliban – there is another alternative. It might seem paradoxical but, although the U.S. and NATO should withdraw from the region because their mere presence is fueling the insurgency – they cannot leave.

Because there is one condition on the ground that must be met before the U.S. can drawdown, which is the implementation of an indigenous political solution that has the best possible chance of stabilizing the country.

AN AFGHAN PERSPECTIVE

The concepts contained herein are radical in nature and one-of-a-kind because they reflect the thoughts and ideas of the Afghan people. This is important to note because the authors firmly believe the only way to end this war is with a complete indigenous Afghan solution – one with zero interference and participation from any other foreign entities.

Any remedy concocted must be designed by native Afghans and imbued with their tradition and custom, because, historically speaking, every other medicament imposed by foreign powers has exacerbated the situation, causing the country to rapidly deteriorate into an unrecognizable shell of what it once was.

External interference in Afghan affairs has resulted in nothing more than ultra-violence, radicalism, poverty, and the destruction of the very fabric of Afghan society. It is nigh time that Afghans are allowed to determine the fate of their own country by reconstituting the sacred unifying tribal structure that has been decimated by over 30 years of foreign invasion, incessant civil war and chaos.

This is the primary focus of the New World Strategies Coalition (NWSC), a think tank founded by Afghan expatriates who possess deep tribal connections. The group focuses on developing political, economic and cultural initiatives for Afghanistan, and unlike any other research institute around the globe, the NWSC - in partnership with other leading native Afghan scholars, experts and NGOs – produces truly indigenous scholarship and solutions.

The NWSC is in a class by itself because it gathers direct feedback and “ground truth” through a communication network of tribal elders and representatives from some of the most well-respected tribes and clans in Afghanistan, and is thus able to channel the collective voice and will of the Afghan people.

This is an important point because the Obama administration, U.S. policymakers, military officials and congressional leaders have absorbed analyses and have made strategic decisions without the participation of and feedback from native Afghans, which the NWSC believes is a primary reason for America’s defective policies.

The reason the NWSC has a built-in advantage is fairly straightforward: the tribes will only disclose sensitive information to other Afghans whom they trust. This is for cultural and practical reasons. The cultural aspect is based on hundreds of years of anthropology and the practical reason is based on fear of reprisal from the powers that be.

To illustrate the value of its indigenous intelligence, the NWSC has been asked to testify before Congress on a couple of occasions. During one session in the mid-1990s, the NWSC warned the U.S. government about the rise of the Taliban. A senior congressman went so far as to say that if the U.S. had listened to the NWSC’s recommendations, 9/11 could have been prevented.

This study is also unique because many of the NWSC’s members, being Afghan expats, serve both the American and Afghan people in their effort to bring peace and prosperity to a war-torn nation, which has been embroiled in a conflict that has caused both countries to lose much in terms of blood and treasure.

They see this mission as a moral obligation – undertaken not only on behalf of their forefathers’ homeland, but for love of their adopted country as well. And the unique Afghan-led solutions proposed herein have the potential to dramatically improve the lives of Americans and Afghans, and can positively alter the momentum and change the dynamics of the overall struggle.

The purpose of this white paper is not to actually specify a political solution, because the crux of the approach is based on Afghan native self-determination. Every significant political

decision will be left up to the Afghan people in a series of *jirgas*. The NWSC's goal is to outline an all-inclusive process and describe a tool that will empower the "silent majority" of the Afghan people, so they can, finally, choose their own destiny.

TRIBAL BALANCE: 40 YEARS OF PEACE

A FORGOTTEN ERA

Once upon a time Afghanistan experienced a forty-year run of peace, stability and social progress during the reign of King Zahir Shah, an era that began in the early 1930s until a family coup ousted the King in 1973. That type of society seems like ancient folklore in light of today's conditions, because after 30 years of incessant war Afghanistan is now one of the most violent, corrupt and poverty-stricken places on earth.

The before and after snapshots are mind-blowing, illustrating a near-incogitable contrast between what Afghanistan was like when it was left to its own devices and free from external intervention, versus its current state after being invaded, occupied and manipulated by foreign powers that have marginalized, weakened and corrupted centuries-old indigenous institutions and value systems.

Eyewitness accounts from the 60s and 70s document Afghan women wearing miniskirts at Kabul University. The sad truth is Afghan society had been in the midst of progressive reform and had been transforming itself, ironically, into an enlightened, modern, and democratic society.

One is challenged to find another example of a society that has experienced such dramatic economic, political, technological and cultural regression in such a short time period. Afghanistan has been bombed, decimated and hurled back centuries, and is now just a shell of the nation it once was.

The challenge before the international community is to first accept and then figure out how to go back in time in order to go forward, while having the faith and moral courage to allow the Afghans to once again control and choose their own destiny.

TRIBAL STRUCTURE AND THE DYNASTIC PRINCIPLE

Replicating the exact form of government, laws, customs and rituals of this time period is not necessary, but there are certain aspects that must be reinstated and strengthened, including sacred tribal tools and traditions so anthropologically ingrained in the Afghan people that they are indispensable to future stability. These qualities and traits also serve to explain why the society-in-a-box being imposed upon the Afghan people by Westerners is anathema to the core fabric of the Afghans' collective being.

The last time the Afghan nation saw anything that resembled stability was when its tribal structure was fully intact and a national unifying monarch sat on the throne - two essential factors that helped maintain what is referred to in this white paper as the "tribal balance".

Throughout Afghanistan’s era of peace the government was based on indigenous principles, intuitions, custom and tradition. The state had been erected upon lessons learned through centuries trying to maintain peace within an insular acephalous tribal society with a penchant for infighting.

Although weakened during the past few decades, tribal principles are still central to Afghan life, as the tribe continues to be the most integral political, economic, military and cultural unit in Afghan society.

The tribal belief system is also based on lineal and ancestral adoration and a near-religious belief in the royal bloodline. This kinship acted as a common thread that provided national solidarity and enabled the head of state to unify the tribes when necessary against external threats.

Afghanistan is still a hyper-fragmented and decentralized society. In the past, when the Afghan state was most functional, although it was technically a constitutional monarchy, the country resembled a “loose” confederation in which legislative and judicial powers were pushed down to the local level - a concept analogous to America’s states’ rights. So one can just imagine how Afghans view the Western-style uber-centralized government of President Hamid Karzai’s administration.

Congressman Dana Rohrabacher characterized how important a loose decentralized type of rule is for Afghans:

“Zahir Shah was the king of Afghanistan for 40 years and was successful because he didn't try to rule the entire country from Kabul. The King had a mandate from God- but he still let the people rule themselves locally.”

The tribal structure, moral code and kinship ensured not only intra-tribal cohesion but unified Afghans at the provincial and national levels as well. Common kinship and the respect for the King were critically important in stabilizing a country that could easily tip into chaos due to its fragmented nature.

The formal and informal power structures in Afghan society were relatively distributed and rarely abused. The tribes were vertically-structured and egalitarian in nature, in which decisions were made based on consensus-building as opposed to orders handed down from a hierarchical command structure.

PASHTUN DURANNI TRIBAL BALANCE

- **Intra-tribal:** cohesion at the family unit driven by tribal moral code called *Pashtunwali*
- **Inter-tribal:** balance maintained by common filial thread, national solidarity in times of crisis.
- **Super-tribal:** distribution of power and authority between the state sovereignty and the tribes (monarch-elites who derived power from moral authority).

Figure 1.0 –Tribal Balance

And although tribal elders and leaders typically had the final say, they were able to become leaders in the first place because they had earned the honor of their respective tribes and derived their power from moral authority, not threat of violence. The inner-cohesion of the tribes was maintained by a moral tribal code that the Pashtuns referred to as *Pashtunwali*, which was based on tribal honor and pride, and also protected the rights of the individual. This tribal moral code even trumped Islam in certain groups.

Unique to Durrani Pashtuns was the fact that their ties to the monarchy established an aristocratic layer on top of the tribal structure. Thus, the monarch-elites had the relationship with the state, while the tribal elders ruled more locally. However, the monarch-elites also drew their power from moral authority based on filial kinship and respect for the royal bloodline.

Zahir Shah was a fine example of a unifying national figure who commanded support that cut across tribal and ethnic lines. He hailed from the Mohammadzai clan which fell under the sacred umbrella of the Duranni tribe – a tribe whose leaders ruled Afghanistan for over 200 years and who derive their name from the founding father of modern Afghanistan, Ahmad Shah Durrani. The Mohammadzais had always remained neutral, had no blood on their hands and no real enemies (at least with respect to Afghanistan, Pakistan’s Bhutto and the ISI are a different story). The King also had been adept at resisting “foreign entanglements” to ensure Afghanistan remained a “neutral buffer state”.

Unfortunately, two non-indigenous movements arose during the end of Zahir Shah’s rule: communism and a reactionary extremist form of Islamic fundamentalism which opened the path for 30 years of tribal destruction.

TRIBAL DESTRUCTION: FOREIGN INTERVENTIONS

30 YEARS OF FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

If ever one needs a reminder as to the magnitude of the havoc wrought on the Afghan people, simply stroll through the countryside – but watch your step. Afghanistan is still the most heavily landmined country in the world with 60 Afghans per month still getting blown up, most of them children who don't know what to look for as they play.¹ As a result, Afghanistan now has the highest percentage of disabled people in the world.

The root cause of the turmoil we see today is that foreign intervention has weakened the tribal balance. In order to properly analyze the symptoms that afflict Afghan society today it is important to understand the history and underlying causes of the country's current decrepit state, which will also shed light on the animus towards foreign occupiers, especially the United States.

A consistent pattern formed of foreign actors attempting to impose non-indigenous systems of government, social programs and/or religions on a people infamous for resistance to external threats and influences. A quick summary of this can be found in figure 2.0 below.

Periods	Rulers/ Powerbrokers	Systems Imposed	Issues
Soviet Occupation (1979 – 1989)	Soviet Union	Communism	Communists did bring some progressive social movements, yet Soviets tried to depopulate the countryside.
Afghan Civil Wars (1989 – 1994)	Mujahideen (Saudis / Pakistanis)	Warlordism	Warlordism result of Saudi and U.S.-funded and Pakistani-trained <i>mujahideen</i>
Taliban Reign (1994 – 2001)	Taliban (Saudis / Pakistanis)	Islamic Fascism	Islamic reactionary religion the result of foreign pan-Islamic Deobandi Wahhabism of Saudis, Pakistanis
NATO Occupation (2001 – 2010)	U.S. and NATO- sponsored Afghan government	Western-style Centralized Democracy	Blatant installment of a “puppet” regime by U.S. and an attempt to implement a corrupt democratic system

Figure 2.0 – History of Foreign Influence

The following brief synopsis of Afghan history is important because it tells the story of how the tribal structure, the dynastic principle and those indigenous values and institutions that bonded

¹ <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1051546.html>

Afghan society together were systematically destroyed, and how purported foreign ideological and religious panacea were actually contraindicative. The following critique, at times stinging, is based on the perspective of most Afghan natives and is a stark reality Western policymakers must come to terms with and weigh heavily during the decision-making process.

U.S. involvement in the annihilation of the tribal order cannot be overlooked, because tribal elders certainly haven't forgotten. Most Americans are not aware of the fact that the U.S. and British intelligence agencies had been working together since the end of WWII to destabilize Afghan society. According to Elizabeth Gould and Paul Fitzgerald in *Invisible History: Afghanistan's Untold Story*, a Manichaeic worldview and Cold War strategy retarded the expansion of anything that resembled communism or socialism – including movements such as nationalism, secularism and even, sadly, progressivism.²

Indisputable proof exists that the U.S. fanned the spread of pan-Islamic extremism during the 1950s and 1960s, and helped facilitate the rise of groups like the Muslim Brotherhood primarily because the U.S. shared the same disdain for communists as conservative religious reactionaries. Through the Asia Foundation – a C.I.A. front – the U.S. funded Islamic extremist movements at Kabul University that eventually led to Afghanistan's indigenous and moderate version of Islam being replaced by the sadistic fundamentalism we see today.

King Zahir Shah ended up the victim of historical circumstances, shackled to a century and a half legacy of colonial domination. Caught between the forces of communism, Islamic fascism and the geopolitics of the Cold War his grand plans for progressive democratic reform were crushed and his country destroyed.

Afghanistan played the role of geopolitical chessboard for U.S. Cold War strategy against the Soviets during the 1970s, a decade that ended with the U.S. and C.I.A. forcing the Soviets' hand into invading Afghanistan to, as Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski put it: "give Russia its Vietnam", as the U.S. went from Nixonian *détente* to Carterian confrontation.

It is now no secret that the C.I.A., via Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), funded and supported violent Islamic jihadists called the *mujahideen* in the Afghan war against the Soviet Union, providing them billions to procure weapons and recruit and train more jihadists. After the Soviet retreat, these *mujahideen* "freedom fighters" became the very warlords that divided and terrified Afghanistan as it spiraled into civil war, moral decay and chaos, which led to conditions ripe for the rise of The Taliban and Al Qaeda.

The Taliban's ultra-orthodox Islamic movement was actually a reactionary cause against the way the *mujahideen* had been practicing their form of Islamic extremism, because, apparently – it wasn't extremist enough.

² <http://www.citylights.com/book/?GCOI=87286100741260>

After the post-9/11 takedown of the Taliban the U.S. abandoned Afghanistan by taking a detour to Iraq and leaving the country – once again – in the hands of warlords. This time the C.I.A. and U.S. military paid these miscreants millions upon millions to “secure and keep the peace”, which further corrupted the country. Thus, the rise of warlordism was yet another non-indigenous phenomenon that would have never taken root were it not for foreign meddling.

TRIBAL WEAKENING

Kabul has fought against restoring the tribal balance since Karzai took office. The Karzai regime has not supported inter-tribal solidarity, even ignoring the decisions of local *jirgas* and *shuras*. Reason being is that the Karzai clique is threatened by tribalism and sees it as much too egalitarian, instead preferring a form of patronage that is not inclusive but serves one side – their side.

The Taliban see the tribal code and custom as an affront to Islam, thus tribal conventions were further weakened during their reign as the chaos of the *mujahideen* warlords was replaced by religious fascism. The Taliban tried to establish Deobandi networks and replace tribal-centered villages with ulema and madrasa-centered structures. Today they are continuing to uproot the tribal foundation, evidenced by their assassination campaign against tribal elders. In addition, according to Afghan expert Selig Harrison, “[S]ince 1979, the role of the hujrah [local secular community center] has been deliberately undermined by Pakistan and other countries including the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia.”

Harrison finds the coexistence and the interaction of the ancient tribal code of *Pashtunwali* with Islamic religious traits to be indispensable for understanding Pashtun culture:

“On the one hand, it explains the inevitable and ritualistic religiosity of a Pashtun, and on the other hand it explains the futility of efforts to inject religious fundamentalism in Pashtun social and political culture as it stands in contradiction to Pashtunwali. In fact, the Islamaic identity of the Pashtuns is only one thousand years old whereas Pashtunwali is reportedly five thousand years old.”

Societal fragmentation has been working in the Taliban’s favor. With the death of the dynastic principle and the absence of a well-respected national leader as head of state, Afghan society now lacks a common lineal thread that could unify the nation.

The implosion and degradation of the tribal structure directly spawned a sad new world now dominated by corruption, violence and poverty. 30 years of conflict resulted in a chain reaction that continues to work against any restoration of a valid state.

Tribalism and dynastic loyalty were principles that cemented the shards of clans and ethnicities together, enabling Afghanistan’s distinctive “regulated anarchy”. But when these bonding agents were destroyed, Afghan society shattered and spiraled into an ever-darkening chaotic abyss, only to be exacerbated by U.S. policies similar to the ones that are arguably the root cause of the current state of affairs.

TRIBAL IMBALANCE: VIOLENCE, CORRUPTION AND CHAOS

CORRUPTION

The nexus between tribal imbalance and America's incoherent military and political strategies are the root causes of the dilemma in Afghanistan, and now America's policies are exacerbating already-deteriorating conditions on the ground.

General David Petraeus's COIN strategy is designed for failure because of the stratospheric odds against winning Afghan hearts and minds. Not to mention the fact that NATO's very presence is fueling the insurgency.

In today's violent atmosphere, between the anvil of the Karzai government and the hammer of the Taliban, there are no viable political alternatives for Pashtuns.

-Thomas Ruttig, Afghan Analysts Network

Also, Afghanistan, with its tribal society and weak tradition of loyalty to the state, is not a promising place for a classic counterinsurgency operation. Its twin goals of protecting the population and guiding the Afghan security forces toward self-sufficiency are inconsistent with Afghanistan's history, culture, and society.

General David Petraeus asserted in his most recent [counterinsurgency \(COIN\) guidance](#) that the U.S. cannot capture or kill its way to victory³. The General said the decisive terrain was the human terrain and the Afghan people are the "center of gravity". He also wrote:

The Taliban are not the only enemy of the people. The people are also threatened by inadequate governance, corruption, and abuse of power – recruiters for the Taliban.

However, U.S.-led forces can execute these COIN guidelines perfectly and would still fail to win over the local populace because Afghans perceive their sitting government in Kabul as illegitimate and corrupt.

Poverty-stricken Afghans watch as billions of dollars worth of foreign aid is poured into a corrupt patronage system and allocated to provincial leaders who act as mob bosses. This combination of economic desperation and wanton graft is a formula the Taliban have exploited time and again. Afghan society functioned much more effectively and equitably when it had a loose decentralized form, as opposed to centralization which breeds corruption on a daily basis.

A recent Pentagon study concluded only 24% of the most critical districts in Afghanistan support the Karzai government and the rest are sympathetic to the insurgency. Respondents cited rampant corruption and ineffective governance as reasons for their opposition, and many

³ <http://www.isaf.nato.int/the-afghan-hands-blog/commanders-blog/comisaf-guidance-01-aug-2010.html>

see Karzai as an illegitimate President because they believe the most recent elections were rife with fraud.

Government corruption is so pervasive that large percentages of Afghans in key districts are willing to suffer through another era of Taliban fascism if the only other alternative is continuing to live under the Karzai regime's reprobate and mob-like rule.

The ultra-centralization that the Americans afforded to be written into the Afghan constitution has been almost as tragic a mistake as propping up Karzai as the leader. The consolidation of power and money among the Karzai family has been mind-numbing.

The President's brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai (AWK), sits at the head of Kandahar's provincial council but runs the region like a kingpin – and is notorious for being involved with security extortion rings, illegal real estate deals and the drug trade.

The U.S. had previously stated that the Kandahar operation will determine the outcome of the war, but if Afghans see coalition forces tied to the President's brother, the U.S. chances of success are slim, if not nil. [Maj. Gen. Michael T. Flynn](#), the senior American military intelligence official in Afghanistan spelled it out succinctly in the New York Times last year⁴:

If we are going to conduct a population-centric strategy in Afghanistan, and we are perceived as backing thugs, then we are just undermining ourselves.

NWSC tribal connections in Kandahar have validated all of the aforementioned sentiments and claim AWK is single-handedly fueling the insurgency.

Meanwhile, President Karzai claims he will not remove his brother because AWK had been "elected by the people". However, the NWSC has first-hand knowledge from tribal leaders that AWK won the council position as the result of a local *jirga*, where representatives vote by raising their hands for all to see. They assert AWK used threats and intimidation beforehand to ensure he won the seat. The tribal leaders assert that AWK would be lucky to get one vote in an honest election, but anyone who valued their life would never dare to vote against him in an open *jirga*.

The bottom line is that the chief source of "inadequate governance, corruption, and abuse of power" is President Karzai, his family and his inner-circle. If it is true, as French army officer and counterinsurgency theorist Roger Trinquier put it, that "the *sine qua non* of victory in modern warfare is the unconditional support of a population", and if the U.S. wholeheartedly believes in the most basic precepts of COIN strategy – then Karzai's very existence as head of state is irreconcilable with capturing the hearts and minds of the Afghan population. Thus,

⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/28/world/asia/28intel.html>

unless something changes at the top, it would be reasonable to conclude that this war is now unwinnable.

Hence, it would seem, Afghanistan is stuck with Karzai at the helm for quite some time, as he wins terms indefinitely because of his organization's impressive electoral fraud operations. Not only that, but it appears the Karzai regime has consolidated even more power by rigging the recent parliamentary elections to ensure that the lower house is fully under the control of a soon to be unchecked executive branch, thus transforming Afghanistan into a *de facto* totalitarian state.

Although it may seem like an affront to our Jeffersonian sensibilities, tribal instruments such as the *jirga* and the Afghan predilection towards a constitutional monarchy have proven to be considerably more representative than the current Afghan government's idea of self-determination.

INSURGENCY

The issue of the Afghan insurgency is complex and subject to numerous interpretations. Despite initial claims that the Taliban were an indigenous force and wanted nothing more than to purge Afghanistan of hated warlords and criminals, a plethora of Western intelligence as well as public statements by Afghan and Pakistani officials indicates the Taliban are closely aligned to a fatal mix of transnational extremists backed by elements of Pakistan's military that are bent on a political and religious transformation of the region.

In a society in which people from different provinces view one another as "foreigners" one can only imagine the sentiments and mixed loyalties that have shaken the Afghan's historical sense of pride in their nationality. As distrust and unhappiness with the U.S.-led coalition's efforts grows, the need for a drawdown of Western forces becomes apparent. Yet, simply abandoning the field to the Taliban would create dire consequences that make the present military occupation look good by comparison.

What the Taliban could never have done for themselves, the coalition has provided by alienating the Pashtun tribes and virtually forcing them into the hands of Taliban "protectors" who have successfully cast themselves as a force for Pashtun nationalism. Plus, there is definitive proof that despite the increase in troops and funds, the Taliban insurgency has grown over the past nine years and overall conditions have deteriorated. A situation succinctly summarized by the Afghanistan Study Group in their recent report *A New Way Forward*⁵:

At almost nine years, the U.S. war in Afghanistan is the longest in our history, surpassing even the Vietnam War, and it will shortly surpass the Soviet Union's own extended military campaign there. With the surge, it will cost the U.S. taxpayers nearly \$100 billion per year, a sum roughly seven times larger than Afghanistan's annual gross national product (GNP) of \$14 billion and greater than the total annual cost of the new U.S.

⁵ <http://www.afghanistanstudygroup.org/>

health insurance program. Thousands of American and allied personnel have been killed or gravely wounded.

And now, because of the decimation of the tribal structure, instead of respected and unifying tribal elders working with residents to build consensus and make decisions for the greater good, the chaos in a war zone has tilted the center of gravity towards “strongmen”, because in a Hobbesian world of “kill or be killed” might trumps tribal tradition and custom.

The chaos has caused a power vacuum in key leadership positions in tribes, districts and provinces that are being filled by warlords, drug traffickers, and corrupt politicians. The tribal code, weakened by the rise of the warlords, has been replaced with a code based on brute force. As Brigadier Justin Kelly put it⁶:

“Unless you are confident in the ability of your government to enforce its peace, then the man with a gun at your door at midnight is your master.”

Tribal leaders have been marginalized and the tribal structure weakened, which has smothered the voice of Afghanistan’s version of the “Silent Majority”, because most Afghans are moral and well-intentioned. But the war has empowered the maligned actors whose sources of power are money and guns.

However, with all that said the great paradox is that though U.S. military strategy is currently making things worse, they cannot leave – at least not until a political solution is put in place that can empower the people and allow them to take back their country.

⁶ <http://www.quadrant.org.au/magazine/issue/2009/4/how-to-win-in-afghanistan>

NO-WIN SOLUTIONS

Mr. Obama needs an exit strategy, but the options he's been provided and other supposed solutions that one reads in op eds across the blogosphere are no-win proposals that will fail to meet U.S. objectives and only make matters worse in Afghanistan.

If the root cause of the current dilemma is tribal imbalance, the obvious answer should be to reinstate this equilibrium – one would think. However, a number of Western foreign policy experts have posited interesting remedies that would do the exact opposite. The status quo counterinsurgency is obviously not the approach, but neither is simply handing the country back to the same set of warlords that caused this mess in the first place. Nor would dividing Afghanistan into partitions be the answer, because it would simply make the state inherently prone to civil war.

IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL

Bereft of a political solution, it is not speculation but a guarantee that if U.S. forces drawdown prematurely, the government in Kabul will collapse and a more divisive and destabilizing civil war shall erupt.

The Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) are just one of the major problems - they are symbols of the central government and not trusted by a society built on localized security. Yet, the U.S. continues to stake their mission on developing these security forces. Without a unifier, after the U.S. withdraws all of this training will become academic when these forces collapse or reunite with the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras of the former Northern Alliance to fight the Pashtun uprising.

Besides not sufficiently reflecting the Pashtun population – the country's largest ethnic group – Afghan national security forces are loaded with drug addicts and criminals due to low pay and the fact that real warriors and fighters are either still defending their tribes or have joined the Taliban, typically for more money.

Once again, ignoring the norms of a decentralized and fragmented society, the U.S.-led coalition tried to force a top-down approach to build a national security force. Instead, they should have focused on strengthening and arming the villages and building a security structure from the ground-up.

An immediate U.S. withdrawal could be disastrous before the political solution is in place, because we have seen what happens in Afghanistan when there is a power vacuum at the top – violent “strongmen” men like the Taliban and warlords seize power.

POWER-SHARING AND RECONCILIATION

The Obama administration is reportedly attempting to negotiate a power-sharing arrangement with the likes of Mullah Omar's Taliban, the Haqqani Network and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's

Hezb-e Islami, with dubious usual-suspect go-betweens involved such as the Saudis and Pakistanis.

The Afghan people have seen this movie before, and it doesn't end very well. Read the tribal elders' lips: the solution must be an Afghan solution – they do not want Pakistani or Saudi Arabian involvement whatsoever.

After the initial takedown of the Taliban after 9/11, the U.S. unabashedly handed the physical security of the country over to warlords, the consequences of which need not be belabored. And now U.S. officials are thinking of brokering a deal to share the Afghan nation with an even more malevolent cast?

As far as reconciliation with the Taliban-led insurgents go, care must be taken because, as Sima Wali, King Zahir Shah's representative to the Bonn Conference once quipped:

“You show me a moderate Talib and I will show you a moderate Nazi.”

There is a difference between allowing disenfranchised Taliban fighters to rejoin Afghan society but an entirely different matter to allow the movement's leaders to share power.

Some within DOD intelligence have suggested that Hekmatyar falls within the “reconcilable” category – which may or may not be true. However, it is likely irrelevant because our sources in Afghanistan have lent the impression that the tribes do not want to negotiate with Hekmatyar and would rather see him prosecuted, exiled to Pakistan forever – or worse.

Ultimately, the U.S. must leave it up to the Afghans. The Afghans should decide which Taliban will be reintegrated into the villages and the Afghan people will determine what role Taliban leaders will have in the new government.

PARTITION

A few Western foreign policy experts have recklessly suggested partitioning Afghanistan, including former Bush administration official Robert Blackwill, based on the premise that since the US cannot win the current war in Afghanistan it should consider a *de facto* partition of the country and hand over the Pashtun south to the Taliban while propping up the north and west where Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazaras live.

However, countries such as Russia, Tajikistan, Iran and Pakistan have at one time or another over the past 20 years proposed similar plans - all to no avail. The Afghan response to such talk - regardless of region, ethnicity or tribe - has been swift and at times even threatening. According to [Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid](#):⁷

⁷ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/7caa5128-94f3-11df-af3b-00144feab49a.html>

Twenty years ago, Gen Dostum told me that the first Afghan who suggests partition would have his throat slit. Before the attacks of September 11 2001, Taliban leaders told me the same thing. The same holds true today.

Afghanistan's ethnic mix is much more complex than Westerners realize and such a partition could have worse consequences than India's ill-conceived division that gave birth to Pakistan in 1947, considering a number of Pashtuns live in the north as quite a few Uzbeks and Tajiks live in the south. It is a recipe for perpetual civil war.

AN AFGHAN SOLUTION

BROAD SUPPORT

HOWEVER, all is not lost. But the indigenous solution will require quite the paradigm shift for most Westerners who will struggle with the concept that Afghanistan's future lies within its past.

It is a historical and undeniable truth that Afghanistan saw a 40-year epoch of peace when there was tribal balance, lineal rule, and society was based on indigenous tradition and custom. And it is very clear what happened when this tribal balance was decimated. Hence, a logical conclusion would be that a restoration of said balance and a return to a truly indigenous form of government is required. The NWSC has designed a peace process that has garnered broad support to achieve such a solution.

What Americans and Westerners must trust is that the majority of Afghans are good people but have been victimized by history and their society devitalized under the repressive control of the minority of warlords and strongmen who have seized and consolidated power. An Afghan solution, however, will empower these people to come forward and take back their country from the oppressors.

At a recent gathering of the Afghan community in the Seattle area, the NWSC received unanimous support from a diverse subset that represented Afghan society, who all advocated for a series of "*All-Afghan Jirgas*" to solve the political dilemma in their homeland.

This idea has been discussed directly with contacts in Afghanistan along with members of the Afghan Diaspora, located in America, Canada and Europe – who all roundly support the concept. This includes influential tribal leaders from the most popular tribes in the South such as the Alokozai and Achakazi; some Ghelzai Pashtuns in the East; and non-Pashtun tribes across the country - including the Hazara, Uzbek, Tajik and Panjshirees in the North. It has even been approved by former Taliban commanders, former members of Hezbi-Islami and retired Pakistani military and intelligence officials.

For anyone that knows anything about the nature of Afghan tribalism and custom - if the aforementioned types of people approve of this idea, then it is beyond all doubt that the entire Afghan nation will accept the plan as well.

THE ALL-AFGHAN JIRGA

The *Loya Jirga* is a "grand assembly" of Afghan leaders and tribal elders typically convened to decide a major political matter such as selecting a new head of state or ratifying a constitution. It is a tool that has been used since the 1700s, especially in times of crisis, including the one assembled in Kandahar in 1747 when Ahmad Shah Durrani was appointed the first Emir of the modern Afghan state.

The *jirga* is actually one of the oldest forms of democracy and will be an ideal tool for selecting Afghan's next government that should meet Western standards of representative sovereignty. The *jirga* is a functioning decision-making body, mythic and sacred in nature, which is steeped in Afghan custom and can actually lead to a strengthening of the internal cohesion of the tribes as well as promote cross-tribal consensus building. The *jirga* will help ensure a unifying, legitimate and representative leader is selected.

The “*All-Afghan Jirgas*” initiative would be organized by the NWSC and its native Afghan partner organizations. A total of three rounds of *jirgas* would be held, the first two of which would be held in neutral countries before the finale in Afghanistan. Below is a breakdown of the objective and location of each *jirga* round:

- *Jirga #1* – Define the solution (country to be determined)
- *Jirga #2* – Develop the implementation plan (country to be determined)
- *Jirga #3* – Choose Head of State (Kandahar)

At the first *jirga* the tribal elders will define the type of government they want, resolve their differences akin to tribal feud or any prior animosity towards one another, and begin the process of nominating candidates for head of state. At the second *jirga* the participants will decide on an implementation plan and at the final *jirga* the head of state and government type will be selected and announced.

The reason for the foreign locales is due to the lack of security in Afghanistan, considering the country is in the middle of a war. Previous *jirgas* held in places like Kabul have been interrupted by gunfire and rocket-propelled grenades. Not to mention that over a dozen people were killed in the run-up to the most recent parliamentary elections.

A *jirga* outcome under foreign occupation would be unacceptable to the tribes; hence Afghanistan would still be stuck with a legitimacy issue. The decisions emanating from a *jirga* held in a neutral country would be accepted as more legitimate because of the absence of coercive powers. If the first two *jirgas* are successful in other countries, it will actually enhance Afghan nationalism and win the trust and confidence of the people.

Kandahar is to host the finale because it's mission critical to winning the war, the heart of Afghan politics and the Taliban's spiritual cradle. Holding an event of such magnitude can rally the local Kandahari populace around the *All-Afghan* cause, diffuse the insurgency and bring relative calm to the entire volatile southern region. Plus, it will bless the process and the nominees with historical recognition and the respect of the people.

One indispensable requirement is that there is no foreign involvement in any phase of the process. U.S. involvement will be relegated to providing “a level playing field” which will be accomplished by simply providing security where and when needed.

The entire process could take anywhere from three to six months. The NWSC will work with other native Afghan NGOs and organizations to create an independent commission stationed in Kabul that would register those who want to attend the *jirgas*. A formula would need to be devised to ensure the decision-making body contained an accurate number of delegates that was a true reflection of the proportionality of Afghanistan's tribal and ethnic demographics.

Parties or groups will not be allowed representation – only individual Afghans. The Taliban, the Afghan government, drug barons or the warlords cannot attend. The likes of Mr. Karzai, Mullah Mohammad Omar, Hekmatyar, Rashid Dostum and other leaders may join the *jirga* as ordinary Afghan citizens without any affiliation – or bodyguards.

BONN AGREEMENT: LESSONS LEARNED

The *All-Afghan Jirgas* concept does bear similarity to the process outlined in Bonn Germany as the post-9/11 war against the Taliban had been winding down, in which a transitional government with an interim leader had been established along with a roadmap to select a new leader and constitution. The Bonn Agreement was aimed at, purportedly, establishing a permanent “broad-based, representative and democratically-elected government”.

The concept of the Bonn Agreement was not the problem but the manner in which it was actualized. The outcomes were already predetermined by U.S. officials, arguably driven by Western geopolitical and economic interests. Motives aside, U.S. manipulation of the *jirga's* results is an underreported historical fact according to M. Chris Mason who served as a U.S. political officer on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Mr. Mason told the NWSC that the Bonn Process was rigged by the U.S. to “put our man Karzai in office”, and he wrote the following in the U.S. Army's own think tank magazine, [The Military Review](#):

In 2002, three-quarters of the participants in the Emergency Loya Jirga signed a petition to make the late King, Zahir Shah, the interim head of state, an inconvenient show of reverence for the monarchy, which required an extraordinary level of covert shenanigans to subvert. Even a ceremonial monarchy would have provided the critically needed source of traditional legitimacy necessary to stabilize the new government and constitution.

It was a clear case of foreigners dictating Afghanistan's future by blatantly ignoring the will of the Afghan people. The cast of characters that did attend were so entrenched with other foreign powers that China, Iran, Russia and other outsiders also were able to influence events. Figure 3.0 below compares the Bonn Agreement to the proposed *All-Afghan Jirgas*.

Figure 3.0: Comparing issues with the Bonn vs. All-Afghan Jirga Process

Issues	Bonn Agreement 2001	All-Afghan Jirgas
Foreign Involvement	Bonn Agreement designed under UN auspices w/ heavy involvement from Westerners and Regional actors (Iran, China, Russia, etc.)	Entire process from concept to implementation will be done by Afghans, for Afghans with zero foreign intervention
Representation	Neglected to invite the opposition (i.e., members of the Taliban)	Thousands to represent all tribes and ethnicities including the opposition
Head of State	Head of state not selected based on the will of the Afghan people - U.S. inserted Hamid Karzai	The new Head of State will be selected based on the consent of the governed
Government	A Western-style, Jeffersonian, highly-centralized democratic form of government had been presupposed	Not predetermined – type of government and leader will be decided by Afghans among various models
Empowerment	Empowered clique of corrupt officials and warlords while weakening the tribal structure	Will empower Afghan people by leveling the playing field and providing each Afghan equal voice while strengthening the tribal structure

U.S. ROLE

Of course, the U.S. cannot abandon Afghanistan either. They just must play a supporting role and not be seen leading the fight. The reality is, the civil war could still rage for awhile and the Afghans will need to deal with this in their own way.

However, the tribes will need U.S. support to defeat Taliban remainders who refuse to yield until a Caliphate is established. It would be a “reverse *mujahideen*” strategy – propping up moderate Afghan pro-government Muslims against jihadists, as opposed to fanning the growth of pan-Islamic extremism as the U.S. did in the war against the Soviets.

Afghans have a warrior code and will fight to the death to defend their tribal honor, especially against foreigners - they are self-contained fighting units that simply require funds, a little training, advisement and upgraded weaponry. Except this time the “outsider” enemy will be the Taliban.

TALIBAN REEMERGENCE

NWSC has also received word from key Pakistani leaders and even some Taliban commanders that they would find a Zahir Shah-like government in Kabul an agreeable alternative.

Some objections may be raised that the Taliban toppled Kabul in the past and will take over once again after NATO leaves. One must remember that the Taliban were able to run roughshod and takeover Afghanistan in the mid-90s because the tribal structure had been decimated and lacked cohesion, not to mention there was the absence of a unifying national leader.

Also, the Taliban had overwhelming and near explicit support from Pakistan's army and intelligence group, led by General Beg and Hamid Gul. Pakistan provided the Taliban with funds, weapons, sanctuary, recruits, training and logistical support and even deployed Pakistani troops throughout the country. They also gave the Taliban enough cash to buy-off warlords and corrupt governors, as some provinces fell under their control without a shot being fired.

Not to mention, ironically, the Taliban carried snapshots of Zahir Shah and deceived the Afghan people by telling many of them once Kabul fell they would reinstall the King – but this never happened. This is yet another illustration of the type of respect the people held for Zahir Shah.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

This white paper was meant to propose a process design and requires a much more detailed project plan and entire other white papers could be written about critical issues and questions that must be considered and answered, including:

- **Pakistan / Saudi Arabia:** How does Afghanistan neutralize Pakistan and Saudi Arabia during the *jirga* proceedings and keep them out of Afghan affairs in general going forward?
- **Drug Trade:** The drug trade is one of the more destabilizing factors and will require an entire white paper to outline any solutions. But much of this solution must come from the U.S. and its intelligence agencies.
- **Government Types:** Ideally the form of government will be left up to the Afghans to decide at the *All-Afghan Jirgas*, however – that could also be a recipe for chaos if thousands of solutions are put on the table. A commission should come together of key Afghan leaders to determine three to five workable options for the group to choose from.
- **Political Fallout:** This process should not be seen as a “loss” to the U.S. government but a big “win”. It is not a rejection of Jeffersonian democracy, but a rejection of its current form. Left to their own devices, the Afghans will perhaps progress to a similar type of government.
- **Security:** Once the plan is announced the delegates will be in grave jeopardy and will be threatened by elements from both the insurgency and the sitting government. The U.S. will have to take care to provide this security so that the delegates will be safe until the political solution is in place.

NEXT STEPS

The next step would be for Congress, the White House and the military to buy into the concept and then fund a deeper assessment that would be accompanied by a detailed project plan. An independent commission of Afghan natives should be established, preferably led by the NWSC, which would handle things such as the logistics of the *jirga*; developing a delegate representation model; identifying, vetting and registering participants; coordinating the development of government options; and acting as a liaison between the delegates and the U.S. government.

For more information contact the following:

Khalil Nouri

President

NWSC, Inc.

khalil.nouri@nwscinc.org

Michael Hughes

Strategist

NWSC, Inc.

michael.hughes@nwscinc.org

NEW WORLD STRATEGIES COALITION, INC. (NWSC)

www.NWSCINC.org