

Thank you David for your kind introduction and for all your terrific reporting over the years. David's most recent book, *The Inheritance*, makes the point that while President Obama took office with great promise, his predecessor left him with some very thorny problems and few good options. And nowhere is that inheritance more fraught than in Afghanistan. On day one, this Administration assumed responsibility for a war heading from strategic drift to a dangerous decline. Now it falls to all of us to get this right.

I recently traveled to Afghanistan and Pakistan, the culmination of several months of asking tough questions and reexamining the assumptions that will drive decisions of enormous consequence. I believe President Obama has been right to deliberate and take the time necessary to find the best policy. Americans are right to be asking whether the objectives are achievable and worth the sacrifice, questions tragically underscored by the deaths of 14 American troops and civilians in two helicopter crashes today. Many of us know too well the price of sending troops into a war where the strategy hasn't been fully thought through. The responsibility never to put them in that position lies not just with the President or the generals, but with all of us.

What began as a fact-finding trip ended with several days of talks with President Karzai to resolve a dispute over the Afghan presidential elections. You may have read that it takes *Three Cups of Tea* to make a deal in Afghanistan—well, let me tell you, it took us a lot more than that. I came home with a fresh reminder of the extraordinary challenges we face, but also with the belief that there is a way forward.

David Sanger mentioned that in 1971 I asked the Foreign Relations Committee “how do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?” Thirty-eight years later chairing the Committee, I keep that question very much in mind. This journey begins in a different place. In September 2001, mass murder was plotted against us from Afghan soil, and we needed to remove the threat. With certainty, we all know why we invaded Afghanistan. It was not a mistake to go in. We must choose a smart way forward now so that no one is compelled to ask whether we've made a mistake in staying.

The easiest way to make a mistake is to tolerate a debate that sells our country short. In recent weeks, politics has reduced an extraordinarily complex country and mission to a simple, headline-ready “yes or no” on troop numbers. That debate is completely at odds with reality. What we need, above all, what our troops deserve-- and what we haven't had-- is a comprehensive strategy, military and civilian combined.

After eight years of neglecting Afghanistan as Vice President, Dick Cheney has come out of retirement to criticize President Obama for taking the time to examine assumptions before sending troops into war. This from the man who in 2002 told America that “the Taliban regime is out of business, permanently.” I think this is the one time I wish Dick Cheney had been right.

But tragically, he wasn't and he isn't, and that's why we have to make tough choices about Afghanistan today.

Make no mistake: because of the gross mishandling of this war by past civilian leadership, there are no great options for its handling today. One American officer captured well our lack of a strategy when he

said: “We haven’t been fighting in Afghanistan for eight years. We’ve been fighting in Afghanistan for one year, eight times in a row.” That is our inheritance.

President Obama began his strategic reevaluation in March, after he did what he promised to do and sent an additional 21,000 troops to Afghanistan—the most recent of whom just arrived in country. Now he is wrestling with what comes next, with the knowledge that all options involve real costs and significant risks.

I believe if we redefine our strategy and objectives to focus on what is achievable as well as critical, and empower the Afghans to take control of their own future, we will give us the best chance to succeed. Yes, legitimate questions remain about just what it takes to achieve our goals in Afghanistan. Yes, Afghanistan is but one of a number of pressing national threats, challenges, and priorities. The \$243 billion price tag is staggering. And yes, many of our stakes there are indirect. But make no mistake: the costs of failure are very real.

In 2001, Al Qaeda maneuvered with impunity in Afghanistan. Today we have killed or captured many top leaders, and few remain there. As a result many Americans are asking, why commit our soldiers and tens of billions of dollars to prevent Al Qaeda from returning to Afghanistan, when they could organize the next attack from Somalia, Yemen, Frankfurt or even from an internet chat room? People want to know, why stay in Afghanistan? And especially, why consider an increase in troops?

First, we start from the premise that Al Qaeda remains at the center of our mission. They still want to attack us, they are still trying to attack us, and we have interrupted plots globally over the last few years. But it’s an awful lot harder to plan new attacks when they are boxed in, harassed, and living in fear. We are, as we ought to be, committed to hunt Al Qaeda wherever they go. Bin Laden and his deputies in Northwest Pakistan haven’t gone far, and to keep them on the run, we must prevent the Taliban – with long-standing ties to Al Qaeda—from once again providing terrorists with an unfettered Afghan safe haven, just across a border that many there view as mere abstraction.

And we must remember that our Afghan mission takes place in the context of a global counterinsurgency. If we, the United States and our allies, are perceived as incapable of doing the job, it would help extremists recruit and raise doubt —not just in the region, but globally—about our resolve and effectiveness.

Second, what happens in Afghanistan has an impact on Pakistan. Pakistan is not only the headquarters of Al Qaeda today but could become the epicenter of extremism in the world. We have enormous strategic interest in the outcome of the struggle in Pakistan. It is a fragile democracy that is fighting a determined insurgency. It has a full nuclear arsenal and a longstanding, sometimes violent rivalry with its neighbor, India. While stabilizing Afghanistan won’t solve all of our problems in Pakistan, instability in Afghanistan can only increase the risk of conflagration where the world can least afford it: next door in Pakistan.

Given the balance of our strategic interests, it should give serious pause to military and civilian strategists alike that the current balance of our expenditure between Afghanistan, where there is virtually no Al Qaeda, and Pakistan, where there is, tallies thirty-to-one. That’s why, regardless of what happens in Afghanistan—and especially if we want to reduce the need for boots on the ground—it is vitally important that we intensify our support and improve our cooperation with Pakistan.

These are the stakes: preventing Afghanistan from becoming a sanctuary for Al Qaeda and destabilizing Pakistan and the region. The challenge then, is to establish realistic goals. That starts with a clear definition of success. I define success as the ability to empower and transfer responsibility to Afghans as rapidly as possible and achieve a sufficient level of stability to ensure that we can leave behind an Afghanistan that is not controlled by Al Qaeda or the Taliban.

Absent any truly good choices, we must ask a simple question: What is doable?

Achieving our goals does not require us to build a flawless democracy, defeat the Taliban in every corner of the country, or create a modern economy—what we’re talking about is “good-enough” governance, basic sustainable economic development, and Afghan security forces capable enough that we can drawdown our forces.

The truth is, we do need to maintain a sustained long-term commitment to the Afghan people. Doing so gives them the assurance they need to reject the Taliban, whom most already despise. But the nature of our commitment must evolve away from a U.S.-military dominated effort and toward support for Afghan institutions and answers. And it only makes sense to continue moving forward if our commitment is reciprocated by the Afghans themselves in the form of improved governance and increased Afghan capacity—civilian and military.

That’s why the cornerstone of our strategy must be to empower and transfer responsibility to the Afghans. That’s the whole ballgame. Which means that we need to ask ourselves at every turn: “will this help the Afghan people take responsibility for their country?”—and where the answer is no, we probably shouldn’t be doing it.

So how do we get there? Our strategy has to be informed by two basic truths. First of all, we can’t draw down large numbers of troops today in order to shift to a narrow counterterrorism mission. Second, we simply don’t have enough troops or resources to launch a broad, nationwide counterinsurgency campaign, nor do we need to.

We all see the appeal of a limited counterterrorism mission— and no doubt it is part of the endgame. But I don’t think we’re there yet. A narrow mission that cedes half the country to the Taliban could lead to civil war and put Pakistan at risk. Moreover, the hardest part of counterterrorism operations isn’t killing the terrorists, it’s finding them. Developing intelligence assets and capabilities should be one of our top priorities because it lets us transition to a more limited presence that still safeguards our interests. But for now, we need boots on the ground to get that kind of information.

On the other hand, we cannot and should not undertake manpower-intensive counterinsurgency operations on a national scale in Afghanistan. Most experts say it would take 400,000 to 600,000 effective international and Afghan troops for a fully-resourced COIN effort. Fortunately, achieving our defined mission does not require such a commitment. We don’t have to control every hamlet and village, particularly when large non-Pashtun sections of the country are already hostile to the Taliban. Our allies, together with the populations of these non-Pashtun areas, can help to reduce America’s principal effort to the southern and eastern theatres—and limit it to major population centers.

We have already begun implementing a counterinsurgency strategy—but I believe that right now it needs to be as narrowly focused as possible. We must be very wary of overextension. And I am

particularly concerned about the potential for us to be viewed as foreign occupiers. Riding around in an armored personnel carrier, as I did last week, and seeing the faces through the window of Afghans watching these monster vehicles go by, you get an eerie sense of the disconnect that Afghans must experience. It was an image I recognized from forty years ago. Look—we are not the Soviets. We're not there to colonize, to conquer, to remake Afghanistan in our image, or to impose an ideology on its people. But it is too easy for our well-intentioned presence to be misread, and for civilian casualties to stoke resentment and resistance. The Administration is right to be deeply concerned by the reality that, as our footprint has increased, so has the number of insurgents.

I am convinced from my conversations with General Stanley McChrystal that he understands the necessity of conducting a smart counterinsurgency in a limited geographic area. But I believe his current plan reaches too far, too fast. We do not yet have the critical guarantees of governance and development capacity. I also have serious concerns about the ability to produce effective Afghan forces to partner with, so we can ensure that when our troops make heroic sacrifices, the benefits to the Afghans are clear and sustainable.

With that in mind, decisions about additional troops should be informed by an assessment of the following three conditions.

First, are there enough reliable Afghan forces to partner with American troops—and eventually to take over responsibility for security? The quickest way out of Afghanistan for our troops is to speed up the training and mentoring of the Afghan National Army and police so that they can defend their own country. The current goal is to increase the number of trained Afghan national army troops from 92,000 to 134,000 by December 2011 and General McChrystal reportedly is trying to complete that within the next year. Key to that will be giving them as much on-the-job training as possible, as soon as possible.

Partnering with Afghans is also a crucial way to relieve the palpable strain of having foreign troops on Afghan soil.

The second question to ask is, are there local leaders we can partner with? We must be able to identify and cooperate with tribal, district and provincial leaders who command the authority to help deliver services and restore Afghans' faith in their own government.

Third, is the civilian side ready to follow swiftly with development aid that brings tangible benefits to the local population? When they support our troops, Afghans need to see their lives improve.

General McChrystal himself has made clear there is no purely military solution and the number of troops misses the point entirely. His now-famous assessment said there is an "urgent need for a significant change to our strategy and the way we think and operate." Ladies and gentlemen, McChrystal's words hit the nail on the head.

The bottom line is that deploying additional troops won't result in sustainable gains if the Afghan security, civilian and governance capacity isn't there -- and right now, as our generals will tell you, in many places, it isn't. Several were very frank that, while they were confident about the security side, their work will fail without an effective civilian strategy. Progress on this front is expected in the coming months with a significant influx of U.S. civilians and efforts to work with the Afghan government to implement reforms.

That's why the right debate isn't simply about how and why and when to deploy troops. It's not how many troops that matters most – it's what they do. The debate should be about how best to create conditions that foster Afghan progress. You can't have a serious discussion about numbers until you have answered these questions.

Under the right circumstances, if we can be confident that military efforts can be sustained and built upon, then I would support the President should he decide to send some additional troops to regain the initiative. Let me be clear: Absent an urgent strategic imperative, we need a valid assessment by the President and other appropriate civilian authorities – not just the military -- that those three conditions will be met before we consider sending more soldiers and Marines to clear new areas.

And it is important to remember that, even if President Obama gives the green light for more troops, as of now the military can only deploy one brigade roughly every three months. According to our senior military leadership, by the end of 2010 we will have a good idea whether our strategy is working. So it is important to remember that we will have ample opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy as we go forward. Progress on governance will be key.

When I arrived in Afghanistan, there was a real worry that an electoral deadlock would drift into an extended period of chaos that benefitted the Taliban. Over several days of talks with President Karzai, I got to know him even better. We spoke about our families and history, and discussed his aspirations for the country and his concerns about the US –Afghan relationship; he voiced his worry that Afghan Pashtuns were being treated unfairly, and yes, we even vented over the frustrations of Presidential elections.

President Karzai and Dr. Abdullah's decision last week to agree to hold a run-off election shows that both men are willing to put their country ahead of politics. But that result is not an end in itself—it's an opening to strengthen our partners and fix some of the problems of governance. I will only matter if we use it as an opening to strengthen our partners and fix the problems of governance. The truth is, the decisions made and actions taken in the weeks and months ahead will be what really give meaning to that moment. If this is to be a turning point, we must strengthen the capacity of the Afghan government and insist that its leaders embrace lasting reforms. This must include addressing the problems caused by corrupt officials at every level of government. This won't be easy, but it will be essential to any chance of success.

To achieve good governance, we also have to redefine the Afghan government beyond Kabul. Just as US city and state governments are expected to deliver education, sanitation, and electricity regardless of who sits in the White House, the Afghan government has to have a face at the district and provincial levels. A more decentralized approach increases accountability and provides better services.

We also need to respect Afghan heritage and work with the tribes. I saw firsthand how powerful tribal elders can be in deciding the future of their communities. We can be strict in using development aid, political support, and even the presence of troops in order to bolster effective tribal leaders and sideline those who are hostile or ineffective. We stand to benefit greatly if we can build up a better tribal intelligence and personal network across the country, and particularly in the Pashtun belt. We have to incorporate Afghan cultural norms, such as local and tribal dispute resolution mechanisms, to help Afghans provide the justice and security they demand. Amazingly, the Taliban actually have

ombudsmen to hold their shadow government accountable to the people. The legitimate government of Afghanistan cannot be less accountable than the Taliban.

If effective governance is to take hold—and I believe our mission depends on it—then our Afghan partners must tackle corruption at the highest levels. The fact that the Afghan government has not prosecuted a single high-level drug trafficker damages all our other efforts because it goes to the question of credibility. The narcotics trade – which generates about 90% of the world’s heroin and \$3 billion a year in profits – not only fuels the insurgency, but also finances the corruption that corrodes governance.

Effective governance must also respect women’s voices. Afghan women’s groups have fought hard to have a seat at the table, and we should support these indigenous efforts because one of the easiest ways to empower Afghans is to empower Afghan women.

Hand in hand with better governance, we need to promote basic sustainable economic development, which persuades Afghans we’re on their side. That means the international community must assemble and resource a real civilian strategy to build the base for a stable Afghanistan. Until now, donors have lacked coordination, discipline, and a national plan. Provincial reconstruction teams differ in their mandate, make up, and mission, with dozens of countries carving out their own chunk of Afghanistan. This approach isn’t sustainable, and it just doesn’t work.

A coordinated strategy of good government and economic development is central to any strategy for success. In a counterinsurgency, the people are the center of gravity and winning their support is the heart of the battle.

Fortunately, the Taliban are far from an insurmountable force. Their brand of extremism rose out of the ashes of the brutal Soviet occupation and the chaos that followed a complete abandonment by the West. But this is not 1996 and the Afghans themselves will not let the Taliban return to power. The Taliban do not represent a unified national movement like the one we faced in Vietnam, nor do they currently represent the kind of ethnic divide we faced in Iraq. There are only a few thousand hardcore, ideological, irreconcilable Taliban, about thirty percent of the total. Many other fighters are motivated by anger at a Kabul government they see as corrupt and ineffective. Others are essentially common criminals, using the Taliban cause to justify drug dealing, kidnapping, and extortion. Still others simply seek a daily wage, or the safety of joining a movement on the upswing. The Taliban is a loose confederation, with widely varying goals and motivations. Many can be lured away by the right combination of money, diplomacy, reintegration into society, and smart outreach to Pashtun tribal leaders—including those who currently back the Taliban.

If we can provide basic economic development, we will go a long way toward winning over the Afghan people. Afghanistan is an agrarian society whose population is among the poorest on earth. Their needs are simple. They are not asking for their society to be transformed overnight. But they are frustrated by the slow, almost invisible, pace of progress.

Clearly development must be improved, but we have some notable successes to build on. Today, 84 percent of Afghans have access to basic health care—ten times the number in 2002. Infant mortality rates are down 22 percent. Under the Taliban, only 900,000 children were in school – and no girls. Today, over 6 million children are enrolled in schools, and two million are girls. In 2002, Afghanistan had only 50 kilometers of intact, paved roads. Today, over 2,700 km of roads have been paved and 80% of

Afghans now live within 50 kilometers of the Ring Road, giving them access to markets, health, and educational facilities.

These successes tell us we need to seek out good Afghan leadership and invest in it; embrace a standardized, national approach for international donors to work together; and invest in Afghan-led programs and institutions like the National Solidarity Program.

Our international allies have a crucial role to play. The decision by NATO defense ministers to affirm an increase in military and civilian contributions is commendable —and long overdue. NATO ministers must now back up these words with a solid commitment – including new troops, trainers and development support.

Better integrating individual NATO countries' efforts into a national, unified command structure would also help enormously. The UN must also do more to better coordinate civilian efforts.

Here's the bottom line: the United States cannot do it alone. And there is something wrong with the fact that today we are borrowing money from China to provide security for Afghanistan, so that China can mine Afghan copper. We want all nations to trade with and invest in Afghanistan. We also want their help stabilizing the country.

What happens inside Afghanistan is important to our strategic interests. But our goals and our mission don't end at Afghanistan's borders. No front is more important in our fight against international terrorism than nuclear-armed Pakistan—and chaos next door in Afghanistan would have enormous repercussions there.

We have a real stake in supporting allies in Pakistan and improving our relationship with the people. That's why we committed to providing the Pakistani people with \$1.5 billion for each of the next five years to build schools, hospitals and roads. We need to make clear that we respect their sovereignty as we give Pakistan vital breathing space to deal with its domestic problems.

These are serious challenges for Pakistan's civilian, military, and intelligence leaders. Historically Pakistani intelligence services have used the Taliban as a hedge, and there is real concern that it continues. If we falter in Afghanistan, factions within Pakistan may well determine it is in their interest to strengthen their dealings with extremists. The good news is that many Pakistanis recognize that they face an existential challenge from within their borders.

The Pakistani military has demonstrated firm resolve with its current offensive against the Pakistani Taliban in Waziristan and they deserve credit for that. We should be doing as much as possible to assist the Pakistani military as they go after domestic extremists. Nothing will do more to help tighten the vise on the remnants of Al Qaeda. America and the international community must reassure Pakistanis that tackling this challenge will lead to a lasting partnership with real economic and security benefits.

We should be reaching out regionally and globally to Moscow, Beijing, Delhi and Central Asia—and also to Tehran. We should explore ways to cooperate with each of them, because each has interests in Afghanistan.

None of this will be easy, but there is a path forward if we focus on what is achievable. We can't build a modern nation from scratch, but we can create policies that shift responsibility and resources to Afghans to build their own country.

Last week, I saw this firsthand when I took a helicopter ride from Kandahar in southern Afghanistan to the fiercely contested Helmand Province. This area was once the breadbasket of Afghanistan, a place where agriculture thrived on irrigation canals built by American engineers in the 1950s and 1960s. Today, drug traffickers and insurgents have transformed it into the world's largest producer of opium for heroin.

In the district of Garmsir, I met with 275 village elders who had convened a tribal *shura* in the courtyard of the district governor's office. The elders told me that they were happy that our troops had brought a measure of peace to such a troubled place, where not long ago the Taliban ran rampant.

They were pleased to see better security. They were pleased with provincial Governor Mangal. But they told me in no uncertain terms what they really wanted: "We have no drinking water in my family compound," one elder said. "No wells, no canals, and no infrastructure." In short, even in the midst of the conflict, what they really wanted was basic services like water.

If we can help Afghans dig the wells and dredge the canals asked for by this village elder in Garmsir, then I am convinced that together we can marginalize the Taliban across Afghanistan. This is a microcosm of what needs to happen wherever our troops are, for our mission to succeed. It underscores how much we need to strengthen our civilian assistance and develop a coordinated approach that targets our resources on the people and places where we can show measurable successes to the Afghan people.

We should remember the words of George Kennan, one of our wisest diplomats and a member of this Council for 59 years. His 1966 testimony before the Foreign Relations Committee was about another war, but it rings true today. He said: "Our country should not be asked, and should not ask of itself, to shoulder the main burden of determining the political realities in any other country... This is not only not our business, but I don't think we can do it successfully."

We need to stay focused on what we *can* do successfully: Do what is possible. Support our troops. Choose the right missions. Train Afghans and build capacity. Regain the initiative and reverse the Taliban's momentum.

It is not our mission to determine the political realities of Afghanistan, and it shouldn't be. That job belongs to the Afghans themselves. But, with the right strategy--rightly debated, rightly defined, and rightly adopted-- we can empower the Afghan people to choose their own destiny. We can increase our leverage against extremists, strengthen the democratic government in Pakistan and bring our troops home. Thank you.