

# Is It Worth It?

The difficult case for war in Afghanistan  
BY STEPHEN BIDDLE

The war in Afghanistan has been nearly invisible to the American public since its initial combat phase ended in early 2002, but it has rapidly come once again into view. Indeed, the war is now poised to become perhaps the most controversial and divisive issue in U.S. defense policy.

Managing this war will pose difficult problems both in Afghanistan and here at home. The strategic case for waging war is stronger than that for disengaging, but not by much: The war is a close call on the merits. The stakes for the United States are largely indirect; it will be an expensive war to wage; like most wars, its outcome is uncertain; even success is unlikely to yield a modern

prosperous Switzerland of the Hindu Kush; and as a counterinsurgency campaign its conduct is likely to increase losses and violence in the short term in exchange for a chance at stability in the longer term.

But failure is not inevitable. The U.S. military is now a far more capable counterinsurgency force than the Soviets who lost to the *mujaheddin* in the 1980s; the Obama Administration is committed to reforming a corrupt government in Kabul that the Bush Administration mostly accepted; and perhaps most important, the United States has the advantage of a deeply flawed enemy in the Taliban. The stakes, moreover, are important even though indirect: Failure could have grave consequences for the United States.

On balance, then, reinforcement is a better bet than withdrawal. But neither option is

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unassailable, and if presented with all costs and benefits appended, neither looks very appealing—and that will make for very contentious politics in the United States.

A war effort that is costly, risky and worth waging—but only barely so—will be hard to sustain politically; it would be just as hard to end. The Obama Administration wisely wants to avoid unrealistic overpromising or the hyping of threats, but for Afghanistan this means promising smaller benefits in exchange for greater exertions, yielding a net cost-benefit calculus perilously close to a wash. By ruling out clarion calls to great sacrifice for transcendent purpose, a sober approach to Afghanistan makes for a very hard sell and exposes the Administration to criticism from all sides. Yet disengagement, a weaker policy on the merits, courts blame, too, if circumstances in Afghanistan, abandoned to its fate, take a darker turn.

Public opinion is beginning to sour on the war, but for now most voters prefer reinforcement to withdrawal. As public attention shifts from Iraq, the domestic political salience of the Afghan war will grow, however, and public opinion could shift. Given that the rationale for war is such a close call, it will make for a daunting challenge in political management regardless of the Administration's policy choice. There is no easy way out of Afghanistan, no clear light at either end of the tunnel, for President Obama.

## Stakes, Costs and Prospects

Analytically, the merits of the Afghan war turn on three questions: What is really at stake? What will it cost to pursue those stakes? And what is the likelihood that the pursuit will succeed?

*The Stakes:* The United States has two primary national interests in this conflict: that Afghanistan never again become a haven for terrorism against the United States, and that chaos in Afghanistan not destabilize its neighbors, especially Pakistan. Neither interest can be dismissed, but both have limits as *casus belli*.

The first interest is the most discussed—and the weakest argument for waging the kind of war we are now waging. The United States invaded Afghanistan in the first place to destroy the al-Qaeda safe haven there—actions clearly justified by the 9/11 attacks.

But al-Qaeda is no longer based in Afghanistan, nor has it been since early 2002. By all accounts, bin Laden and his core operation are now based across the border in Pakistan's

Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The Taliban movement in Afghanistan is clearly linked with al-Qaeda and sympathetic to it, but there is little evidence of al-Qaeda infrastructure within Afghanistan today that could directly threaten the U.S. homeland. If the current Afghan government collapsed and were replaced with a neo-Taliban regime, or if the Taliban were able to secure political control over some major contiguous fraction of Afghan territory, then perhaps al-Qaeda could re-establish a real haven there.

But the risk that al-Qaeda might succeed in doing this isn't much different than the same happening in a wide range of weak states throughout the world, from Yemen to Somalia to Djibouti to Eritrea to Sudan to the Philippines to Uzbekistan, or even parts of Latin America or southern Africa. And of course Iraq and Pakistan could soon host regimes willing to put the state's resources behind al-Qaeda if their current leaderships collapse under pressure.

Many of these countries, especially Iraq and Pakistan, could offer al-Qaeda better havens than Afghanistan ever did. Iraq and Pakistan are richer and far better connected to the outside world than technologically primitive, landlocked Afghanistan. Iraq is an oil-rich Arab state in the very heart of the Middle East. Pakistan is a nuclear power. Afghanistan does enjoy an historical connection with al-Qaeda, is well known to bin Laden, and adjoins his current base in the FATA. Thus it is still important to deny al-Qaeda sanctuary on the Afghan side of the Durand Line. But the intrinsic importance of doing so is no greater than that of denying sanctuary in many other potential havens—and probably smaller than many. We clearly cannot afford to wage protracted warfare with multiple brigades of American ground forces simply to deny al-Qaeda access to every possible safe haven. We would run out of brigades long before bin Laden ran out of prospective sanctuaries.

The more important U.S. interest is indirect: to prevent chaos in Afghanistan from destabilizing Pakistan. With a population of 173 million (five times Afghanistan's), a GDP of more than \$160 billion (more than ten times Afghanistan's) and a functional nuclear arsenal of perhaps twenty to fifty warheads, Pakistan is a much more dangerous prospective state sanctuary for al-Qaeda.

Furthermore, the likelihood of government collapse in Pakistan, which would enable the establishment of such a sanctuary, may be in the same ballpark as Afghanistan, at least in the medium to long term. Pakistan is already at war with internal Islamist insurgents allied to al-Qaeda, and that war is not going well. Should the Pakistani insurgency succeed in collapsing the state or even just in toppling the current civilian government, the risk of nuclear weapons falling into al-Qaeda's hands would rise sharply. In fact, given the difficulties terrorists face in acquiring usable nuclear weapons, Pakistani state collapse may be the likeliest scenario leading to a nuclear-armed al-Qaeda.

Pakistani state collapse, moreover, is a danger over which the United States has only limited influence. We have uneven and historically fraught relations with the Pakistani military and intelligence services, and our ties with the civilian government of the moment can be no more efficacious than that government's own sway over the country. The United States is too unpopular with the Pakistani public to have any meaningful prospect of deploying major ground forces there to assist the government in counterinsurgency. U.S. air strikes can harass insurgents and terrorists within Pakistan, but the inevitable collateral damage arouses harsh public opposition that could itself threaten the weak government's stability. U.S. aid is easily (and routinely) diverted to purposes other than countering Islamist insurgents, such as the maintenance of military counterweights to India, graft and patronage, or even support for Islamist groups seen by Pakistani authorities as potential allies against India. U.S. assistance to Pakistan can—and should—be made conditional on progress in countering insurgents, but if these conditions are too harsh, Pakistan might reject the terms, thus removing our leverage in the process. Demanding conditions that the Pakistani government ultimately accepts but cannot reasonably fulfill only sets the stage for recrimination and misunderstanding.

If we cannot reliably influence Pakistan for the better, we should at least heed the Hippocratic Oath: Do no harm. With so little actual leverage, we cannot afford to make the problem any worse than it already is. And failure in

Afghanistan would make the problem in Pakistan much harder.

The Taliban are a transnational Pashtun movement active on both sides of the Durand Line and are closely associated with other Pakistani insurgents. They constitute an important threat to the regime in Islamabad in rough proportion to the regime's inherent weaknesses (which are many and varied). If the Taliban regained control of the Afghan state, their ability to use the state's resources to destabilize the secular government in Pakistan would increase the risk of state collapse there. Analysts have made much of the threat that Pakistani Taliban base camps pose to the stability of the government in Kabul, but the danger works both ways: Instability in Afghanistan also poses a serious threat to the secular civilian government in Pakistan. This is the single greatest U.S. interest in Afghanistan: to prevent it from aggravating Pakistan's internal problems and magnifying the danger of an al-Qaeda nuclear-armed sanctuary there.

These stakes are important, to be sure, but they do not merit an infinitely high price tag. Afghanistan's influence over Pakistan's future is important, but it is also incomplete and indirect. A Taliban Afghanistan would make a Pakistani collapse more likely, but it would not guarantee it. Nor does success in Afghanistan guarantee success in Pakistan: There is a chance that we could struggle our way to stability in Afghanistan at great cost and sacrifice, only to see Pakistan collapse anyway under the weight of its own elite misjudgments and deep internal divisions.

*The Cost:* What will it cost to defeat the Taliban? No one really knows. War is an uncertain business. But it is very hard to succeed at counterinsurgency (COIN) on the cheap. Current U.S. Army doctrine is clear on this point:

[M]aintaining security in an unstable environment requires vast resources, whether host nation, U.S., or multinational. In contrast, a small number of highly motivated insurgents with simple weapons, good operations security, and even limited mobility can undermine security over a large area. Thus, successful COIN operations often require a high ratio of security forces to the protected population. For that reason, protracted COIN operations are hard to sustain. The effort requires a firm political will

and substantial patience by the government, its people, and the countries providing support.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the doctrinal norm for troop requirements in COIN is around one security provider per fifty civilians. Applied to the population of Afghanistan, this would mean about 650,000 trained soldiers and police. If one assumes that only half the country requires active counterinsurgency operations (the south and east at the present time), this still implies a need for about 300,000 counterinsurgents.

Ideally, most of these forces would be indigenous Afghans, but there is reason to doubt that the Afghan government will ever be able to afford the necessary number of troops. If any significant fraction of this total must be American or NATO-based, then the resources needed would be very large in relation to total force availability.

The commitment could also be very long; successful counterinsurgency campaigns commonly last ten to 15 years or more.<sup>2</sup> And, at least initially, casualties could be heavy. An extrapolation from the 2007 experience in Iraq could imply more than fifty U.S. fatalities per month during active pacification.<sup>3</sup>

*Prospects of Success:* In general, the historical rate of great power success in COIN is not encouraging—around 25 percent.<sup>4</sup> And some

<sup>1</sup>*The U.S. Army-Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Seth Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, (RAND Corporation, 2008), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>The financial costs are also likely to be high. The Congressional Research Service estimates that the war in Afghanistan cost \$34 billion in FY 2008 and projects that this figure will increase in coming years. See Amy Belasco, *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan and other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11* (Congressional Research Service, October 15, 2008).

<sup>4</sup>See Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson, "Rage Against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars", *International Organization* (Winter 2009); and Ivan Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), which finds "strong actors" winning only 45 percent of asymmetric conflicts between 1950 and 1998.

important features of Afghanistan today are enough to give anyone pause. Orthodox COIN theory puts host-government legitimacy at the heart of success and failure, yet the Karzai government is widely seen as corrupt (even by local standards), inept, inefficient and en route to losing the support of the population. Ultimate economic and political development prospects are constrained by Afghanistan's forbidding geography, lack of infrastructure and political history. The Taliban enjoy a cross-border sanctuary in the FATA that the Pakistani government seems unwilling or unable to eliminate. Violence is up, perceptions of security are down, casualties are increasing, and the Taliban enjoys freedom of movement, access to the population and financial support from a thriving drug trade.

Worse perhaps, we can affect only some of these challenges directly. We can increase security by deploying more troops, we can bolster the economy to a degree with U.S. economic aid, we can put some pressure on poppy production, and we can pressure Karzai to reform. But only the Afghans can create a legitimate government, and only the Pakistanis can shut down the safe havens in the FATA. We can influence Afghanistan and Pakistan to a much greater degree than we have so far, but we cannot guarantee reform ourselves. To date, neither ally seems ready to do what it takes.

This does not make failure inevitable, however. Great powers' poor track record in COIN is due partly to the inherent difficulty of the undertaking but also to poor strategic choices. We can learn from experience, and we can change strategies and methods. Indeed, the U.S. military has learned a great deal about COIN in recent years. The new Army-Marine counterinsurgency doctrine is the product of a nearly unprecedented degree of internal debate, external vetting, historical analysis and assessment of recent experience.

The new Administration, moreover, seems determined to address one of the Afghan effort's most important remaining shortcomings. The new doctrine assumes a close alignment of interests between the United States and its host government: The manual assumes that our role is to enable the host government to realize its own best interest by making itself into a legitimate defender of all its citizens' well-being. If this is indeed what the host wants, U.S. aid will bring improvement

in a direct, unproblematic way—and this is largely what the Bush Administration assumed in providing aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan with few strings attached. But if local leaders put self-interest ahead of public interest and rank currying favor with local elites above economic development or broad political legitimacy, then unconditional aid will often be misdirected and governing legitimacy sacrificed in favor of short-term personal expediency. Many see Hamid Karzai and Pervez Musharraf as precisely the kind of leaders who put their own tenure first and real legitimacy second. Such problems lead some students of counterinsurgency to emphasize the need for conditionality in aid in order to encourage behavior that broadens a host government's legitimacy and weakens the insurgency. The Obama Administration has made it clear that it intends to combine bigger carrots with real sticks by withdrawing aid should recipients fail to adopt needed reforms. This is an important step forward.

The forces implementing COIN doctrine are also much improved over their Vietnam-era predecessors—and even over their immediate predecessors in Iraq in 2003–04. The U.S. military of 2009 has become uncommonly proficient at counterinsurgency, combining stronger doctrine with extensive COIN combat experience, systematic training and resources that dwarf most historical antecedents. More should be done to improve U.S. COIN capability, but we are now vastly better at this than, for example, the Soviets were in the 1980s, and much more proficient than most historical great power counterinsurgents have been.

Perhaps most important, we are blessed in Afghanistan with deeply flawed enemies. Afghans remember what life was like under Taliban rule, and few want to return to their brand of medieval theocracy. Of course, these preferences are secondary to the need for security, and often to the desire for basic services such as courts free of corruption or police who enforce the laws without first demanding bribes. But because most Afghans oppose Taliban rule, we enjoy a strong presumption in favor of the government, as long as that government provides at least basic services competently.

The Taliban are also far from a unified opposition group. Contrast them with the Viet Cong of 1964, for example, a force in which a

common ideology bound the leadership together and linked it to its fighters. The neo-Taliban of 2009 are a much more divided coalition of often fractious and independent actors. There is a hard core of committed Islamist ideologues centered on Mullah Omar and based in Quetta, but much of the Taliban's actual combat strength consists of an array of warlords and other factions who often side with the Taliban for reasons of profit, prestige or convenience. Depending on the circumstances, they may not follow orders from the leadership in Quetta. We often lament the challenges to unity of effort flowing from a divided NATO command structure, but the Taliban face difficulties on this score at least as severe as ours and potentially much worse. No NATO member would ever switch sides and fight for the Taliban, but one or more component factions of the Taliban might well leave the alliance for the government side. This makes it difficult for the Taliban to mount large-scale, coordinated offensives of the kind needed to conquer a defended city, for example.

In addition, the Taliban face major constraints in extending their influence beyond their ethnic base in southern and eastern Afghanistan. They are a Pashtun movement, but Pashtuns make up less than 45 percent of Afghanistan's population overall and constitute only a small fraction of the population in the north and west, where the Taliban have very little popular following.<sup>5</sup> The Afghanistan war is mainly about ideology, not ethnicity (the government is itself run in large measure by Pashtuns such as Hamid Karzai). Nevertheless, the Taliban's narrow ethnic base makes it hard for them to conquer the north and west of the country. It acts as a limit on their expansion in the near term.

Taking all this into account, advocates for withdrawal from Afghanistan certainly have a case. The stakes are not limitless, the costs of pursuing them are high, and there is no guarantee that even a high-cost counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan will succeed. But success is possible all the same, given our strengths and our opponents' limitations. And failure could have potentially serious consequences for U.S. security.

The Taliban's weaknesses make it hard for them to overthrow a U.S.-supported government

while large Western military forces defend it. But without those Western troops, the Afghan state would offer a much easier target. Even with more than 50,000 Western troops in its defense, the Karzai government has proven unable to contain Taliban influence and prevent insurgents from expanding their presence. If abandoned to its fate the government would almost surely fare much worse. Nor would an orphaned Karzai regime be in any position to negotiate a compromise settlement that could deny the Taliban full control. With outright victory in their grasp, it is hard to see why the Taliban would settle for anything less than a complete restoration.

A Taliban restoration, as noted, could restore to al-Qaeda a sanctuary for attacking the United States. And even if a Taliban 2.0 regime vetoed al-Qaeda attacks on the United States, it would almost certainly provide Pashtun militants and their allies in Pakistan a massive launching pad for efforts to destabilize the regime in Islamabad. Even without a haven in Afghanistan, Pakistani insurgents might ultimately topple the government, but that threat clearly grows with the additional resources of an openly sympathetic state across the Durand Line. And this raises the specter of Pakistani nuclear weapons falling into al-Qaeda's hands in Pakistan.

The danger of a nuclear al-Qaeda should not be exaggerated, however. For a U.S. withdrawal to lead to that result would require a networked chain of multiple events: a Taliban restoration in Kabul, a collapse of secular government in Islamabad, and a loss of control over the Pakistani nuclear arsenal (or deliberate transfer of weapons by sympathetic Pakistanis). These events are far from certain, and the compound probability of all of them happening is inherently lower than the odds of any one step alone. But a U.S. withdrawal would increase all the probabilities at each stage, and the consequences for U.S. security if the chain did play itself out could be severe. During the Cold War, the United

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<sup>5</sup>This is why, even in their first rule, the Taliban never completely secured the north. Indeed, it was the unconquered Northern Alliance's hold over contiguous territory in that part of Afghanistan that provided the allies a jumping-off point for U.S. Special Forces, which teamed with them to topple the Taliban in 2001.

States devoted vast resources to diminishing an already-small risk that the USSR would launch a nuclear attack on America. Today, the odds of U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan yielding an al-Qaeda nuclear weapon next door in Pakistan may be relatively low, but the low risk of a grave result has been judged intolerable in the past and perhaps ought to be again. On balance, the gravity of the risks involved in withdrawal narrowly make a renewed effort in Afghanistan the least-bad option we have.

## U.S. Politics and Afghanistan

Barack Obama's presidential campaign promised to de-emphasize Iraq and refocus on Afghanistan. At the time, his Afghan hawkishness drew little opposition. The dovish wing of the Democratic Party feared they might hand John McCain the presidency if they undermined support for their nominee. Republicans saw the Iraq war and the Afghan war as important on the merits and also as Republican political legacies, discouraging opposition to either war.

Today the political landscape is different. The Obama Administration put its stamp on Afghanistan policy by boosting troop levels and contrasting this approach with Bush's COIN-lite methods there. But by putting his seal on the current strategy, Obama has freed Republicans to criticize the conduct of a war that will now be waged with a distinctively Democratic strategy and led by a new commanding general. At the same time, some left-leaning Democrats, increasingly frustrated with the Administration's centrism on other issues, see escalation in Afghanistan as a further demotion of the progressive agenda they expected Obama to push forward.

Meanwhile, the American public, which has focused mostly on Iraq for the past six years, has begun to rediscover Afghanistan—and it is uncomfortable with what it sees. A March 17, 2009 *USA Today*/Gallup poll, for example, found that 42 percent of those polled believed it was a mistake for the United States to send troops to Afghanistan, up from 30 percent in February and just 6 percent in January 2002. The percentage of those saying the war is going well dropped to 38 percent

in March from 44 percent just two months earlier.<sup>6</sup>

For now, the public still supports both the war and the Obama Administration's approach to it: A February 20–22 Gallup poll found 65 percent of respondents favoring the President's decision to send an additional 17,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan, with only 17 percent favoring a total withdrawal. But that support is fragile. Indeed, a nascent Afghan antiwar movement is already visible, and it includes both Democrats and Republicans. It is small now, but if history is any guide, it will grow as losses do, which they surely will. Even a successful counterinsurgency campaign looks bad in the early going. Classical COIN trades higher losses early on for lower casualties later, which will make the coming year in Afghanistan a hard one, regardless of the strategy's ultimate merits. Many of the announced reinforcements will be used to clear areas now held by the Taliban and hold them against counterattack, both of which will increase near-term casualty rates. As the U.S. troop count increases, so will the violence, and many will associate the former with the latter. Expect the calls for withdrawal to grow apace with the body count.

The coming Afghanistan debate is unlikely to get as vitriolic as the one over in Iraq in 2006–07. That affair erupted from a potent mix of partisanship and anger at perceived deceit, and so is unlikely to recur. But the political problems the new antiwar movement will pose for Obama could actually be harder to overcome than those the Iraq opposition posed for Bush. After all, Bush was able to circle the wagons, rally his base, and push an unpopular position through Congress by holding the Republican Party together, thereby forcing congressional Democrats to either unite behind a different approach to Iraq or acquiesce in Republican policies. Democrats chose the latter, giving President Bush the freedom to conduct the war as he wished.

Obama, by contrast, heads a Democratic Party that is already divided on the Afghan

<sup>6</sup>Tom Vanden Brook, "Afghan War Hits Peak of Disfavor", *USA Today*, March 17, 2009; Jeffrey Jones, "In U.S., More Optimism About Iraq, Less About Afghanistan", *Gallup.com*, March 18, 2009.

war and likely to grow more so over time. He also faces a series of domestic crises that will require him to spend political capital in order to win support for his governing agenda. Republicans have shown little willingness to cooperate on anything else, and the Administration's new ownership of the Afghanistan war gives the GOP another opportunity to retreat into opposition as the news from the front gets worse. Obama could face a situation in which a bipartisan antiwar coalition threatens the majority he will need to maintain funding for an increasingly unpopular war. His ability to impose party discipline could be limited by competing priorities, depending in part on how long and how deep the economic crisis turns out to be.

These challenges will likely get harder over time. If U.S. forces reach a positive military turning point in the Afghan campaign soon enough, political opposition in the United States will wither, as it mostly has with regard to Iraq since late 2007. But if the conflict proves as long and arduous as many counterinsurgencies have, votes on many budgets over several years will be needed to bring this war to a successful conclusion. These votes will take place against the backdrop of mounting casualties, increasing costs and growing pressure to restrain Federal budgets in the face of unprecedented deficits. The result could be a slow bleeding of support as a protracted COIN campaign goes through its inevitable darkest-before-the-dawn increase in casualties and violence.

Even if the Afghan war were an unambiguous necessity, the political challenge of holding a congressional coalition together through a long period of apparent gloom would be hard enough. But a war whose merits skirt the margin of being worthwhile makes this harder still, especially for an Administration that seeks to be restrained and realistic about expectations in Afghanistan. Moreover, the strongest part of the Administration's case for war, the link between Afghanistan and al-Qaeda, is ultimately indirect. The link is real, but with Osama bin Laden in Pakistan and with the strategic importance of Afghanistan lying chiefly in its effect on its neighbor, a candid, realistic appraisal of Afghanistan's stakes for the United States requires both modesty and the articulation of a

more complicated causal chain than is normal in wartime appeals for U.S. public support. This is an honest leader's nightmare and his speechwriter's greatest challenge.

However, reversing policy and disengaging would be no easier for Obama. It would be the wrong course on the merits. Politically, it would commit the Administration to a policy now supported by only 17 percent of the electorate. It would play into the traditional Republican narrative of Democratic weakness on defense, facilitate widespread if ill-founded Republican accusations of the Administration's leftist radicalism, and risk alienating moderate Democrats in battleground districts whose support the President will need on other issues. However bad the news may look if the United States fights on, withdrawal would probably mean a Karzai collapse and a Taliban victory, an outcome that would flood American TV screens with nightmarish imagery.

Withdrawal would also gamble the Democratic Party's future—not to mention the nation's—on the hope that the worst potential consequences of withdrawal and collapse can be averted safely. If the United States pulls out, the Karzai government falls, the Taliban establishes an Afghan state haven, Pakistan collapses and a Pakistani nuclear weapon falls into bin Laden's hands, then a decision to walk away from Afghanistan would be seen as one of the greatest foreign policy blunders of the modern era. Unlikely as this chain of events may be, to withdraw from Afghanistan while success is still possible is to accept this gamble voluntarily. It is to stake potentially enormous consequences on a decision that need not have been taken. Therein lies the dilemma: *Neither* course, staying or leaving, is politically easy or strategically safe.

The best policy, therefore, is to defend an expensive, risky, potentially unpopular war with an argument that is sound but ultimately indirect and a close call on the merits. And this will need to be done by the leader of a divided party in the face of rising antiwar sentiment and a host of competing demands, political and financial. Barack Obama is a perhaps uniquely skilled political communicator, and his policy for Afghanistan is the right one. But even the right policy for Afghanistan is going to be a very hard sell indeed. 🌐