

Smooth is Fast

Managing Security Transitions for Enduring Freedom

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EVALUATION OF THE ongoing security transition in Afghanistan highlights several leadership and management strengths that will yield to an Afghan-led responsibility by 2014. Control measures that provide assessment and feedback are critical to ensure the effort is on track and that we can make refinements to sustain momentum. Study of previous security transitions and the ongoing operations in Afghanistan provide insight for optimizing Enduring Freedom levels. To promote greater unit and personnel stability, trust, and continuity, tour lengths in Afghanistan should remain at one year, and we should incentivize key leaders, selected staff, and soldiers with specialized skill sets to extend tours to even longer lengths of two or more years. We should increase readiness levels, random access measures, and patrols during the transition period as enemy activity will most likely increase to try to interrupt the process and undermine the Afghan government. An important constant for successful transitions in Germany, Japan, Korea, and Kuwait is the presence of enduring bilateral strategic security framework agreements that contribute greatly to increased security and stability in selected successful case studies. This article recommends a longer-term U.S. presence in Afghanistan to best promote a stable democracy, and the finalization of a bilateral security arrangement with Iraq that supports some reintroduction of U.S. forces in a defense security cooperation posture.

In light of ongoing significant transitions in U.S. force structure while leading the security transition effort in Afghanistan, we should emphasize that an enduring freedom is a product of an enduring commitment. The recommendations reflect historical U.S. military training and operations principles in Field Manual (FM) 1: “Warfighting is complex, but the historical lessons of the military art...boil down to several rules of thumb applicable at every level of war...These...require commanders to master transitions... Mastering transitions is key to the conditions for winning decisively.”¹

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PHOTO: U.S. Army 2LT Glen D. Pegher, a platoon leader assigned to 30th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, Task Force Storm, ensures his soldiers are in appropriate firing positions while providing security for Afghan National Security Forces in Khanwar District, Afghanistan, 10 January 2011 (U.S. Army photo by SGT Cooper T. Cash)

Long-term Commitment

Evaluation of the ongoing security transition in Afghanistan highlights several leadership and management strengths including a detailed plan for methodical transition phases leading to complete transition to an Afghan responsibility by 2014. Management control measures that provide assessment and feedback are important to the security transition to ensure the plan's successful implementation and refinements to sustain its momentum. Study of previous security transitions and the ongoing operations in Afghanistan provide tactical, operational, and strategic level security management recommendations for optimizing enduring freedom levels. From a personnel management standpoint, tour lengths should remain at one year to promote greater unit and personnel stability, trust, and continuity during the important transition period for the next several years in Afghanistan, and we should incentivize key leaders, selected staff, and soldiers with specialized skill sets to extend tours to even longer lengths of two or more years. Readiness levels, random access measures, and patrols should increase during the transition period because enemy activity levels will most likely increase during the transition to interrupt the process and undermine the Afghan government.

The presence of enduring bilateral strategic security framework agreements that contribute greatly to increased security and stability in the selected successful case studies was an important constant for transitions in Germany, Japan, Korea, and Kuwait. This article strongly recommends a longer-term U.S. presence in Afghanistan to best promote enduring freedom, and the finalization of a bilateral security arrangement with Iraq that supports some reintroduction of U.S. forces in a defense security cooperation posture. In light of ongoing significant transitions in U.S. force structure while leading the security transition effort in Afghanistan, policy makers should emphasize the task of preserving enduring freedom as a product of enduring commitment. To summarize, successful management of security transitions should reflect historical training and operations principles: Stand to. Stay the course. Slow is smooth; smooth is fast.

Historical Context

In 1757, in preparation for combat operations in the French and Indian War, Major Robert Rogers and his executive officer, John Stark of colonial New Hampshire, were charged with recruiting companies of colonists to prepare for war. As part of preparing these forces, Rogers established several rules of thumb. These rules, commonly known today as Roger's Rules, are still used and emphasized at the U.S. Army Ranger School at Fort Benning, Georgia.² One of the rules alludes to an Army term called "stand to," or period of an increased state of readiness. The rule directed that the entire unit needed to be up at dawn because dawn was the time that the French and Indians attacked. Rogers wanted all his forces to be ready for an attack during the transition period between night and day. By ensuring his entire force was alert and ready for battle during this vulnerable time, he ensured a better chance of tactical mission success and a greater level of protection for his soldiers. As the NATO coalition goes through a vulnerable time during the security transition in Afghanistan, leaders need to take appropriate measures to effect a strategic and operational "stand to" in order to protect the force and enable the transition to go as smoothly as possible. Good leaders ensure their units are prepared. They do everything possible to protect and defend their units based on an accurate assessment of conditions on the battlefield. Like Major Rogers and his New Hampshire rangers, during transitions leaders at all levels should take actions to ensure unit success, create a winning mindset, and guard against complacency. For a successful security transition in Afghanistan, leaders at all levels will need to conduct combat and stabilization and reconstruction operations effectively as a product of long-term strategic vision and planning.

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Transitioning to Afghan Responsibility by 2014

The security transition from coalition to Afghan responsibility scheduled for 2014 is an important objective of the international community and an important step for Afghanistan. High complexity makes this a difficult task. The objective of any successful transition is for the host nation or indigenous security forces to have capability, capacity, competency, commitment, and the confidence of the people they serve and to adequately ensure an environment of stability and security with shrinking outside assistance.³ NATO has outlined specific criteria for transitions for a particular area.⁴ The four transition criteria for Afghanistan are as follows:

- Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) capable of shouldering security tasks with less assistance from the International Security Forces (ISAF).

- Security sufficient to allow the population to pursue routine daily activities.

- Local governance developed well enough that security will not be undermined as ISAF assistance is reduced.

- ISAF postured to thin out as ANSF capabilities increase and threats diminish.

Management and leadership of this process will be a challenge for the coalition and Afghanistan. An efficient system of assessment and control will be paramount to success. To protect the force and be successful, coalition and ANSF leaders must mitigate the friction of war and erosion of trusting relationships that result from executing the transition with constantly rotating units and high personnel turnover. The recent rise in rogue or insider attacks on coalition forces also erodes relationships at a critical time in the transition.



(Photo by U.S. Army 1LT Adam Carrington)

U.S. Soldiers from Task Force Gridley say farewell to Afghan National Security Forces as the task force prepares to leave after a one-year rotation, Paktika Province, 18 February 2012.

With very public announcements and media commentary about the security transition from policy-makers and the NATO coalition leadership to ANSF leadership, a positive and what should be encouraging message has generated fears that actually work against the planned leadership transition in 2014.

Expectations among the Afghans indicate disconnects between the hopes and aspirations of the Afghans and the international community on the prospects for long-term stabilization of Afghanistan. Many Afghans perceive the [Bonn II] conference as a venue to hurriedly transfer authority to complete the transition process by 2014, not taking cognizance of the fragile conditions on the ground.⁵

Couple this with current events and an announced withdrawal, and one sees trust in the 10 year-old partnership waning.

Leaders need to balance personnel turnover and the corresponding short-term mission perspective with daily operational requirements while maintaining a focus on long-term objectives. Recently, a senior NATO officer was relieved from duty for candid remarks about the Afghan government. Because of similar reliefs or rotations, the ISAF command at one point had four different commanders during a span of 24 months. This high turnover in leadership impairs mission accomplishment and weakens relationships with the ANSF and senior political leaders. Usually, it takes months to bridge cultural differences and develop trust in mentoring relationships with the Afghans. Given the volatile, changing environment in Afghanistan, can we make an effective security transition and is a successful model available?

Korea as a Model for Transition

The U.S. experience in Korea provides a positive model for conducting effective stability operations leading to the eventual transition of security responsibilities. On 17 April 2012, the United States and South Korea transferred wartime command of ROK military forces from the U.S. military to the South Korean government “ending 60 years of American control.”⁶ The additional examples of post-World War II Europe in Germany and the eventual transition of security responsibilities in Japan also provide successful models. The recent transition in Iraq

provides a contemporary example, but it is probably too soon to judge if it is a successful model. Other tangential issues to the question of managing security transitions include balancing the need for transparency with the need for a certain level of information protection and balancing conditions-based decision making with timeline-driven milestones.

The security transition in strategically located Afghanistan is taking place at a time when the nation is also making political and economic transitions in a very dynamic, contentious environment where “the enemy gets a vote.” Important for the transition will be maintaining Afghan trust with strategic communications, ensuring that “a calendar driven, unconditional, publicly announced drawdown schedule” alleviate Afghan fears of U.S. abandonment. As some researchers note, “Since the United States handed the war over to NATO in 2003, many Afghan officials and local powerbrokers have feared abandonment and the subsequent fall of the government. Afghans (and Pakistanis) widely expect the United States to leave in response to domestic, political, and related economic pressures and to do so regardless of Afghan choices or conditions.”⁷

Slow is Smooth: Smooth is Fast

Transitions should not be rushed. An Afghan proverb reminds us that the way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. The same could be said for leading, planning, and executing security transition. U.S. soldiers use a training proverb similar to the Afghan proverb. It states, “Slow is smooth. Smooth is fast.” I stress this training adage, used by forces training for the U.S. Army Infantry Battle Drill 6A, “Enter Building, Clear Room,” because soldiers entering the doorway or fatal funnel of a room are at high risk and need to be smooth in the execution of their tasks to ensure safe entry.⁸ Smooth execution requires at first seemingly slow methodical learning and repetition, then as proficiency and skills develop, it becomes mistake-free, fluid motion. If the process is not smooth, moving through the fatal funnel of the doorway actually takes longer than it should and can cause soldier casualties from enemy or friendly fires. As forces execute the much more complex task of entering a security transition period in Afghanistan, leaders need to ensure that the process is as smooth as possible to minimize threats to both forces and ensure Afghans are set up for success in the decades

to come. We should not rush the process or trivialize the effort.

Historical examples such as U.S. experiences in Germany and Korea over the past several decades demonstrate that transitions that are a product of long-term commitment and shared interests can be highly successful. U.S. leaders must address operations and personnel and unit turnovers during the critical transition as well as achieve unity of effort and manage the 40-plus member coalition force transitions.

Security Transition Management in Afghanistan

Endorsed in 2010 by both NATO and ISAF, the Joint Afghanistan-NATO Integral Board demonstrates commitment to the transition process and oversees the transition effort.⁹ Transition involves the “posturing and thinning out” of ISAF personnel as the Afghan security forces develop capability and threat levels stabilize or diminish. Conducting a security transition to an Afghan force with constantly changing and rotating NATO and ISAF forces presents a dangerous, difficult, and complex problem for military and diplomatic leaders and planners. The Taliban’s constant harassing attacks present additional danger. United States and NATO forces are already conducting the lead security responsibility transition to the ANSF. A large percentage of NATO soldiers and leaders in Afghanistan serve an average of six to nine months, and some coalition and non-U.S. NATO forces serve shorter tour lengths of four months. Even within U.S. forces, tour lengths vary by service. Currently, U.S. active duty soldiers serve 12-month tours on average, while reservists serve 9-month tours. In 2012, the length of tours for U.S. soldiers declined to nine months.¹⁰ Longer force stabilizing tours would better support the transition in Afghanistan, and permanently stationing a division there (as the Second Infantry Division is in Korea) would produce better continuity for the transition.

Leaders at all levels need to take steps to reduce the friction of war during security transitions. Groundwork done now will contribute to ultimate success in the future. Shaping the battlefield and setting the conditions for success are marks of good leadership. Good leaders manage expectations effectively by steering their units through difficult periods of transition to position them to succeed

in an undeveloped future environment.¹¹ Historical models and program evaluation of the ongoing transition plan will provide insights and lessons for improving the transition.

Strategic Framework and Partnership Prospects

Strategic leaders must define in advance the long-term strategic relationship.¹² Policymakers, political, military, and organizational leaders, as well as the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) will benefit from long-term planning considerations and partnership effects. As these important leaders press on with the security transition, it is prudent to examine successful and generally peaceful stability and security operations in countries like Korea, Germany, and Japan. Difficult security transition experiences in Somalia and Vietnam provide additional historical perspective. As leaders establish time-lines and benchmarks with assessments and analysis, they should consider unit and personnel turnover issues as well as the already diminishing troop levels available for the security lead transition.

Is there an optimum tour length for U.S. soldiers that will contribute to greater success? What steps can leaders take to manage personnel and unit turnover effectively while conducting a security transition? What conditions can leaders at all levels create to ensure a successful transition in Afghanistan? Historian Ali Jalali states, “Although Afghan and international leaders face innumerable obstacles to success, leaders will be particularly challenged by the need to balance the rebuilding of the security forces with the demands of fighting an ongoing insurgency.”¹³ Regarding security arrangements in Korea, Geun-hye Park notes, “to ensure stability, trust-politik should be applied consistently from issue to issue based on verifiable actions, and steps should not be taken for mere political expediency.”¹⁴ Organizations collectively benefit when leaders at all levels manage transitions effectively in an environment of personnel turnover. Successful management and organizational effectiveness during a transition can translate to military and civilian lives saved, dollars better invested, and groundwork completed for regional stability and security. In the greater long-term strategic context, is a “Miracle on the Kabul River” in Afghanistan conceivable?

Theoretical Framework for Achieving an Effective Transition in Afghanistan

Figure 1 depicts RAND Corporation researcher James Dobbins' discussion of aspects of achieving change in nationbuilding efforts.¹⁵ His discussion identifies time, money and manpower as important inputs to the level of security. The leader and management issue in Afghanistan is employing the right mix of these variables for U.S. and host-nation security forces. Dobbins' study demonstrates that increasing time with U.S. presence in the host nation correlates historically to increased and sustained levels of enduring freedom. As leaders contemplate yet another reduction in forces while endeavoring to maintain the "right mix" of forces, capability, and cost, it will be important to consider the perseverance required. Long-term commitment in the face of shortsighted and often emotional arguments for a quick exit will contribute to enduring freedom in Afghanistan.

Stability and Security Doctrine

Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations*, states that success is a function of "patient, resolute, and persistent pursuit of national goals and objectives." The JP highlights the important principle of perseverance: "The purpose of perseverance is to ensure the commitment necessary to attain the national strategic end state," and "involves preparation for measured, protracted, military operations in pursuit of the national strategic end state" due to the fact that "decisive resolution" of conflict in the short-term is often "difficult to achieve" and "elusive."¹⁶ Failure to provide a managed smooth security transition can cause a "loss of momentum" or impede national objective achievement.

Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, further discusses joint plans and designs that manage uncertainty by "providing options, aligning resources, and mitigating risks" and stresses the importance of assessment, learning, and adapting during transitional stability and security operational environments.¹⁷ JP 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, and JP 3-07.3,

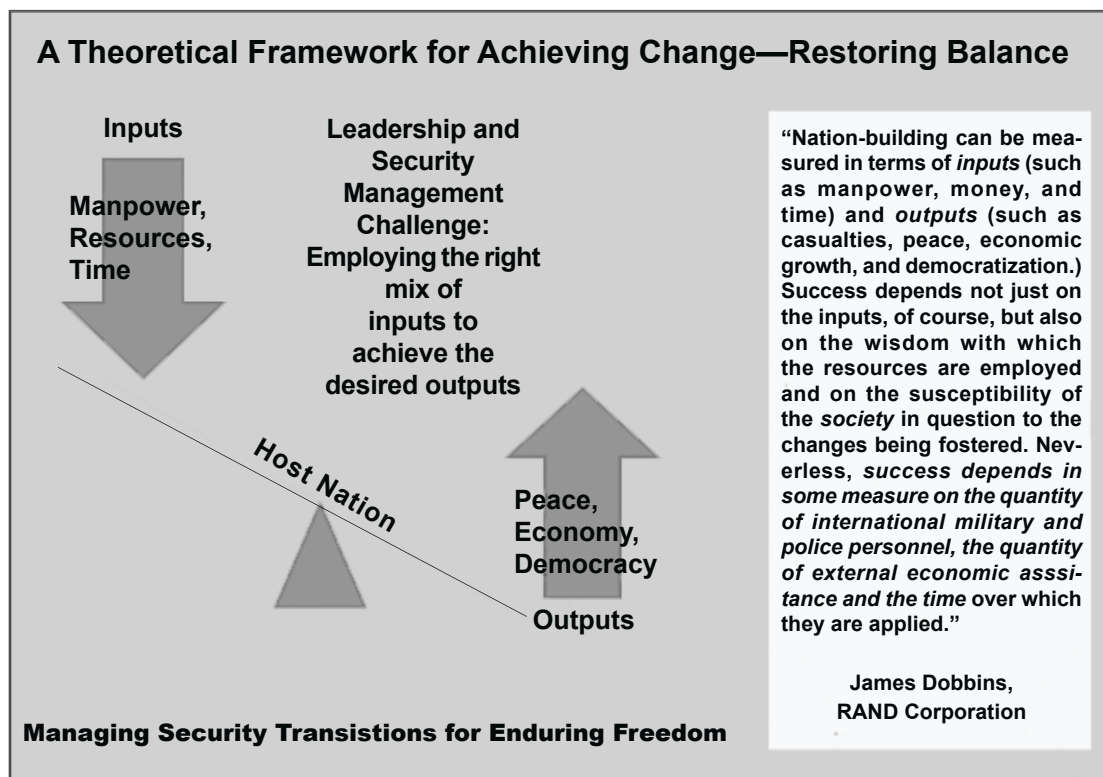


Figure 1
Theoretical Framework for Achieving Change—Restoring Balance

Peace Operations, provide additional emphasis on security transitions as a product of interagency and multinational cooperation to “shape the environment to support reconciliation and rebuilding” and facilitate the transition to legitimate host-nation governance.¹⁸ JP 3-24 highlights relationships as critically important, but with a tendency to “break down” during transitions.

Field Manual 3-07.1, *Security Force Assistance*, discusses the importance of developing rapport and its components, understanding, respect, and trust linked to effectiveness:¹⁹ “Building up the foreign security forces and alleviating the root causes of the current situation over time” and “solving problems in a broader political, military, social and economic context” are important aspects of security assistance and internal defense operations.²⁰

“In COIN, the side that learns faster and adapts more rapidly—the better learning organization—usually wins. Counterinsurgencies have been called learning competitions.” Hence, FM 3-24 identifies “learn and adapt” as a modern COIN imperative for U.S. forces. “Perceived inconsistency reduces credibility and weakens the COIN effort.”²¹ Enemies of the ongoing transition will look for ways to erode trust in the coalition and the Afghan government during the years leading up to the 2014 transition.

Biannual DOD Report on Progress

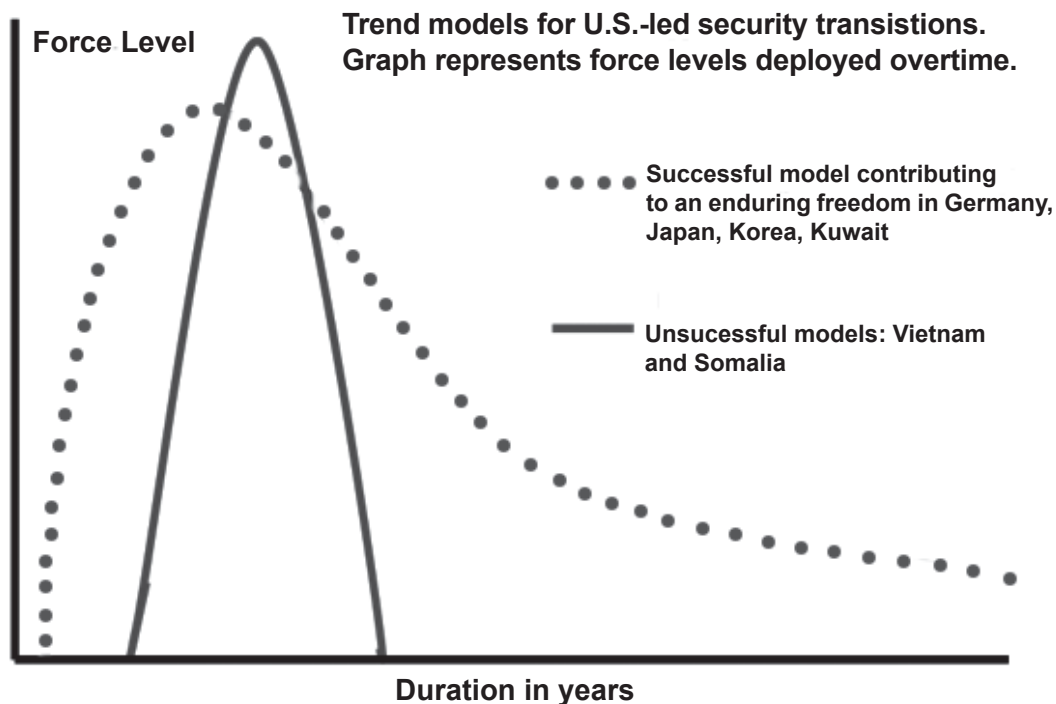
An important resource for a current assessment of ongoing security transition operations is the DOD “Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan and the United States Plan for Sustaining Afghanistan National Security Forces.” Required by Congress every six months, the report provides specific updates on transition information such as advisory programs to both the Afghan National Police and the Afghan National Army, trainer and mentor strengths, literacy efforts, and ANSF capacity and growth rates. Statements and assessments on leader development are also important resources that provide not only statistical data but also comments on the effectiveness of partnering efforts. Current assessments of ratings of the various Afghan National Army headquarters and battalion level units provide additional insights.²²

Sustaining momentum and ensuring resource availability are of the utmost importance in Afghanistan.

During the 5 December 2011 International Afghanistan Conference in Bonn (Bonn II), the international community and the GIROA resolved to “renew our mutual commitment to a stable, democratic and prosperous future for the Afghan people.”²³ The conference acknowledged the ongoing security transition efforts and reinforced the importance of continuing progress along broad lines of effort, including governance and economic development as well as sustainable security force growth. An important aspect of the Bonn II Conference was the “strategic consensus” between the international community and Afghanistan to recognize that security and Afghan “well-being” will affect the entire region and to build on the previous ten years of engagement. As the transition progresses, a shift to partnership in a “Transformation Decade” will occur.²⁴ Sustaining momentum and ensuring resource availability are of the utmost importance in Afghanistan. The most difficult and important resources to develop are the Afghan personnel resources to execute and sustain the effects of the lead security transition.

Staying the Course

Change requires time and often the expected benefits “lag behind” the actions taken to implement the change. One of the important reasons given for manager shortcomings in this area is that leaders often fail to “anticipate the decline in performance, productivity, or satisfaction as change is implemented.”²⁵ “Effectiveness declines before it gets better” is an adage for managers to consider as they experience “short-term” performance declines while negotiating periods of transition. Patience and “trust” are required of managers and leaders as they shepherd their organizations through transitions.²⁶ Possessing a long-term “staying-the-course” mindset, and acknowledging turbulence associated with change



Measuring Perseverance

Figure 2
Successful and Unsuccessful Model Comparison

while cultivating trust are aspects of successful transition management.

“Like all strategy, transitions require an appropriate balance among objectives, concepts, and resources.”²⁷ As both Dobbins and Harry R. Yarger discuss, the right mix of forces is a necessary ingredient to a successful transition. While regional, cultural, and religious differences in Afghanistan are significant in comparison to Korea in the 1950s and 1960s, the task of conducting a successful security transition associated with both Korea and Afghanistan make the model a very relevant study. Joseph Pak writes on post-conflict transition in Korea, outlining issues and challenges U.S. Forces-Korea faced assisting the emerging Republic on the Korean Peninsula. Pak provides troop strength levels over time and concludes that the transition in Korea was successful due to shared U.S. and host-nation interests, desire on the part of the host nation to make the transition, the security established by the United States, and the

proper allocation of time for the transition.²⁸ Pak discusses specific steps U.S. commanders took to encourage and assist their South Korean military counterparts, providing a basis of comparison to ongoing transition operations in Afghanistan. Dr. Tim Kane’s research on U.S. troop deployment levels from 1950 to 2005 provides data on the impact of troop deployments on geopolitics. Similar research will assist leaders managing the transition of focus from ongoing efforts to emerging threats and priorities.²⁹

Security Assistance and Presence Beyond 2014

U.S. Army (retired) Lieutenant General David Barno and his colleagues with the Center for a New American Security propose several options for U.S. policy, including maintaining the status quo, delaying the transition, continuing the transition with a mission change to “security assistance” and accelerated transition and withdrawal.³⁰ This discussion

supports the Center for a New American Security option three: a continuance of the transition mission with a change to a security assistance mission maintaining U.S. presence in Afghanistan beyond 2014 to promote regional stability and enduring freedom. The U.S. experiences in Korea, Japan, and Germany demonstrate the value of “staying the course” and a longer security transition. Historical models demonstrate that short-term personnel can successfully implement security transitions if one implements steps to mitigate the loss of momentum that occurs with personnel turnover.

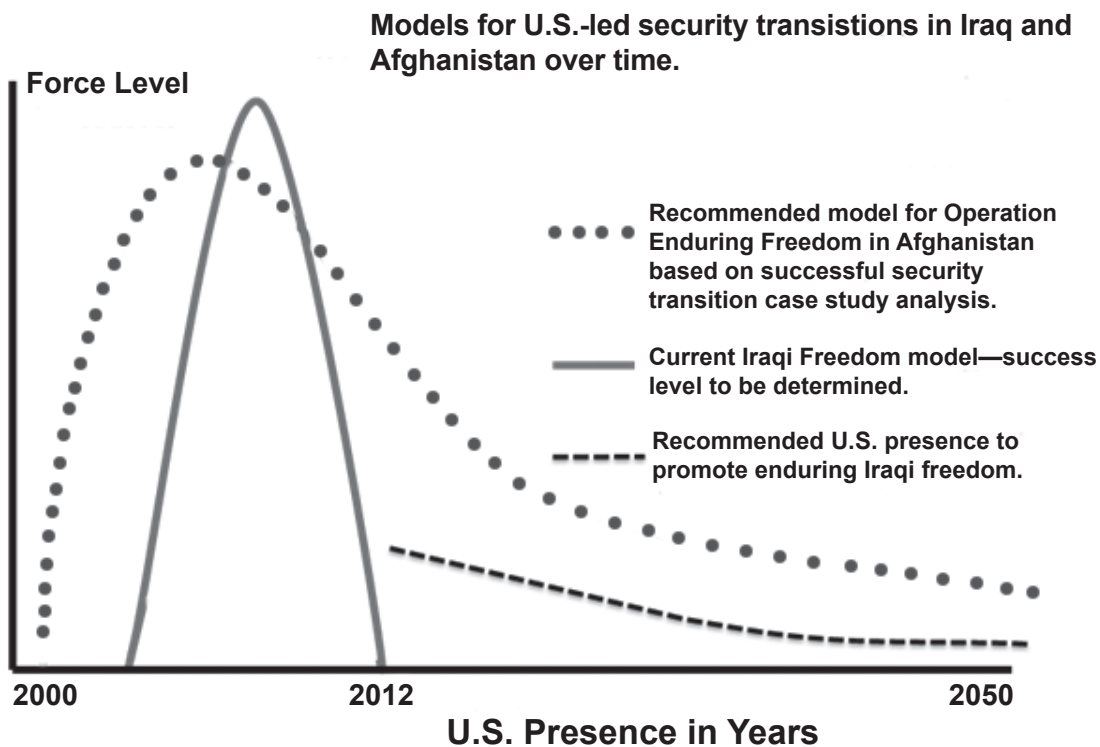
Recommended Model for Successful Transitions

One should not discount the successful security transition models of Germany, Japan, Korea, and Kuwait in favor of shortsighted, less expensive alternatives. The Vietnam security transition model and the Soviet Union’s complete withdrawal from Afghanistan resulted in continued

fighting with millions of lives lost and host-nation societies enslaved in economic and political systems of poverty that lingered for many years after conflict termination. We should not repeat these unsuccessful models in Afghanistan.

Successful transition models recommend a gradual force drawdown, coupled with an enduring U.S. presence to optimize enduring freedom in Afghanistan, as well as a reintroduction of a mutually agreed on level of forces in Iraq under an established security framework in a security cooperation role. The United States and Afghanistan should cement a long-term partnership that will ensure a more stable and secure environment far beyond 2014.³¹

The long-term presence of U.S. forces has been a constant for successful security transitions. The end-strength levels vary, but a presence in larger or smaller numbers correlates favorably with greater freedom levels. All of the selected operations made use of rotational forces and experienced varying degrees of personnel turnover that



Measuring Perseverance

Figure 3
Recommended Security Transition Model for Enduring Freedom - Long Term U.S. Presence in Iraq

affected momentum and performance levels in the short-term. However, the security arrangements and demonstrated long-term commitment partly mitigated the impacts of the turmoil of personnel and unit turnover. In addition to successful transition management, Germany, Korea, Kuwait, and Japan experienced significant economic growth in part due to the security enhancing presence of the United States and reconstruction efforts.³²

Probably the strongest contributor to enduring freedom will be the negotiation of a strategic framework providing some level of U.S. troop presence contributing to stabilization and security partnership efforts in Afghanistan. As Figure 2 proposes, the Korea model of a sustained U.S. presence coupled with a gradual drawdown of forces would contribute greatly to enduring freedom as a product of a smooth security transition. Despite U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, the United States is in the process of negotiating a security cooperation agreement including a program of exercises, training, and “other forms of cooperation.”³³ The effort to establish a long-term security agreement with Afghanistan should not be underwhelmed. A strategic framework will be an important confidence-building measure for the future.

Successful transition efforts demonstrate that reentry of U.S. forces into Iraq in an advisory and long-term presence would afford an increased opportunity for enduring freedom in Iraq. As depicted in Figure 3, the trajectory, for a long-term U.S. presence, if implemented, would be beneficial for Iraq and the region, especially given the instability and rising potential nuclear threat in Iran. Large troop concentrations are not necessarily the solution, as the United States has used a much smaller footprint effectively in Kuwait to provide a satisfactory security transition in contrast to larger troop levels for the sustained U.S. presence in Germany, Japan, and Korea.

Winning Mindset and Strategic Leadership

George Washington’s long-term vision of a people “achieving almost anything” prescribed a recipe for a successful free nation.³⁴ As U.S. Army FM 1 notes, a winning organizational mindset is

a critical component to successful progress. The successful security transitions in Germany, Japan, Korea, and Kuwait represent incredible leadership and human capital management invested for long-term strategic gains that produce high levels of enduring freedom and economic prosperity for the host nations. The security transitions were also products of an optimistic vision and belief that difficult does not mean impossible. The ongoing security transition efforts in Afghanistan promise greater regional stability and levels of enduring freedom if they reflect U.S. troop employment and personnel strength security transition management experiences in Germany, Japan, Korea, and Kuwait. If Iraq, Afghanistan, and the greater international community desire similar results, they must persevere and develop a winning mindset. “Sound planning based on a well-developed strategy is critical to ensure lessons learned over the years from Iraq are incorporated in Afghanistan and that competing resources [especially human resources] are prioritized effectively.”³⁵ Strategic leadership cultivates perseverance by creating long-term vision with a winning mindset.

Running the Gauntlet

Is it worth it? In terms of lives, time, and money, this is a research question that soldiers and leaders in Afghanistan have asked at one point or another during their service in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

In 1777, in Bennington, Vermont, New Hampshire’s General John Stark returned to the front to support the patriot cause with his colonial rangers. Armed with Roger’s Rules of Ranging and historical lessons from revolutionary engagements at Bunker Hill and Trenton and experience 20 years earlier fighting with the French and Indians, he returned to the battlefield to lead a successful attack on enemy positions. He was memorialized later for his efforts and “live free or die” charge to colonists making the security transition from colony to independent nation.³⁶ He understood 235 years ago what research and security transition management experience demonstrates today. Enduring freedom is worth it and is a product of enduring commitment. Stand to. Stay the course. Slow is smooth; smooth is fast. **MR**

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