



UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE www.usip.org

SPECIAL REPORT

2301 Constitution Ave., NW • Washington, DC 20037 • 202.457.1700 • fax 202.429.6063

ABOUT THE REPORT

This report examines the U.S. relationship with Afghan president Hamid Karzai from its warm start to the suspicion and hostility of the end of Karzai's term. The report traces the causes of the deterioration to U.S. actions and Karzai's world view and experience. Funded by the United States Institute of Peace, the report is based on research, interviews with senior Afghan and U.S. officials, and the personal interactions of the author with Karzai over ten years.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ronald E. Neumann is president of the American Academy of Diplomacy and previously served as ambassador to Afghanistan from 2005 to 2007, following previous ambassadorships in Bahrain and Algeria. He is the author of, among other works, the book *The Other War: Winning and Losing in Afghanistan*.

Ronald E. Neumann

Failed Relations between Hamid Karzai and the United States

What Can We Learn?

Summary

- The U.S. relationship with Afghan president Hamid Karzai deteriorated from a warm start to suspicion and hostility over the course of Karzai's term. Both sides bear responsibility, and the United States can learn lessons from this.
- Karzai brought with him to office little experience in governing but many political habits derived from years of Afghan tribal and war politics, particularly power balancing rather than institution building and extreme suspicion about the other side's motives when he felt threatened.
- U.S. military and economic dominance meant that relations would always be unbalanced. Karzai was left with appointments, often of corrupt individuals, as a means to create a political base.
- U.S. policy changed frequently, as did the way Karzai was handled and the advice he was given. Afghan sovereignty was often ignored. For lengthy periods U.S. goals were unclear, not only to Karzai but to many other Afghans.
- Afghan sovereignty was frequently ignored, and with it Karzai's dignity and position as a leader—a particularly threatening problem in view of Afghanistan's history.

Introduction

The relationship between the U.S. government and President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan became very difficult throughout Karzai's administration, from 2002 to 2014. This paper intertwines personal and political considerations as well as aspects of the Afghan political culture that is part of Karzai's life experience—largely ignored in U.S. political calculations—to exam-

© 2015 by the United States Institute of Peace.
All rights reserved.

SPECIAL REPORT 373

MAY 2015

CONTENTS

Political Culture and Personal Style	2
Imbalance in Power Relations	3
Early Years	3
Autonomy of U.S. Military Action	4
Pakistan	5
The Obama Administration	6
Civilian Casualties Again	9
Night Raids and Detainees	9
Confusion Becomes Certainty	10
Negotiating with the Taliban	11
Maintaining the Relationship	12
No Trust	12
Lessons for the Future	14

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan institution established and funded by Congress. Its goals are to help prevent and resolve violent conflicts, promote postconflict peacebuilding, and increase conflict management tools, capacity, and intellectual capital worldwide. The Institute does this by empowering others with knowledge, skills, and resources, as well as by its direct involvement in conflict zones around the globe.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Stephen J. Hadley, (Chair), Principal, RiceHadleyGates, LLC, Washington, DC • **George E. Moose** (Vice Chair), Adjunct Professor of Practice, The George Washington University, Washington, DC • **Judy Ansley**, Former Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor under George W. Bush, Washington, DC • **Eric Edelman**, Hertog Distinguished Practitioner in Residence, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Washington, DC • **Joseph Eldridge**, University Chaplain and Senior Adjunct Professorial Lecturer, School of International Service, American University, Washington, DC • **Kerry Kennedy**, President, Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, Washington, DC • **Ikram U. Khan**, President, Quality Care Consultants, LLC, Las Vegas, NV • **Stephen D. Krasner**, Graham H. Stuart Professor of International Relations at Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA • **John A. Lancaster**, Former Executive Director, International Council on Independent Living, Potsdam, NY • **Jeremy A. Rabkin**, Professor of Law, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA • **J. Robinson West**, Chairman, PFC Energy, Washington, DC • **Nancy Zirkin**, Executive Vice President, Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Washington, DC

MEMBERS EX OFFICIO

John Kerry, Secretary of State • **Ashton Carter**, Secretary of Defense • **Gregg F. Martin**, Major General, U.S. Army; President, National Defense University • **Nancy Lindborg**, President, United States Institute of Peace (nonvoting)

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.

To request permission to photocopy or reprint materials, e-mail: permissions@usip.org

ine the U.S.-Karzai relationship and to draw, from the sad state of what was once a relationship of personal and political warmth, some lessons for the future. Responsibility for failure lies partly with Karzai's reactions and character. Yet much of the problem was of U.S. making and was avoidable. Each side provoked the other in a repetitious, downward spiral.

The relationship was always going to be unbalanced because power tilted toward the United States. As Kai Eide, former UN secretary general's special representative to Afghanistan said, it was a relationship "between partnership and occupation"¹—a difficult dynamic but one U.S. actions made worse than necessary. Karzai was convinced that the United States was making a few key mistakes:

- Not dealing with the problem of Pakistani sanctuaries for insurgents. As long as they had them the insurgents would never lose.
- Civilian casualties that Karzai was convinced would eventually destroy Afghan support for his government and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization/International Security Assistance Force (NATO/ISAF) coalition.²
- Preventing the reestablishment of a strong, central Afghan government by creating parallel structures of government and development outside Afghan control or knowledge and belittling the government and himself so that they appeared as foreign puppets.

These underlying disputes intensified over the years, compounding individual incidents. The miscommunication became worse during the Obama administration. The United States came to see Karzai as more of a problem than a solution but developed no strategy to work with or remove him. Karzai felt he was being deliberately weakened and insulted. He tightened his links with supporters, many of whom were corrupt. The U.S. approach was counterproductive and showed no awareness or understanding of how it was perceived in the presidential palace. The downward spiral of miscommunication and suspicion continued to the end of Karzai's presidency in September 2014.

Political Culture and Personal Style

Because Hamid Karzai is a gracious man who speaks excellent English, many expect him to react as a Westerner might to political situations. This overlooks the society he lives in, his political background, and—at the risk of simplified cultural stereotyping—some Afghan cultural characteristics that Karzai shares. It is important to situate Karzai in his own context before blaming him for not responding as though he were someone else.

Although a cultured person and avid reader who has traveled extensively, Karzai has never lived in the West. He came to the Afghan presidency with almost no experience in governing. His formative early years were spent in Afghan tribal politics and strife. As Kai Eide remarks,

Visitors tended to overlook the fact that [Karzai] was also very different from the many Western educated politicians who and spend years—even decades—in Western countries...He had always been an Afghan politician to the core, raised and trained in an Afghan political culture based on Afghan traditions. He had learned the Afghan way of doing politics from his father....More than anything else, this was his world.³

In that world, tribal and subtribal family-based leadership is founded on ability as much as family. Authority relationships are far less hierarchical than they are in Iraqi tribes.⁴ Potential leaders in a group seeking to replace their current leadership often try to weaken rather than directly oppose or fight the opposition. This breeds a culture of suspicion intensified by twenty-five years of internecine warfare and shifting alliances. Leaders learned to pay constant attention to who might be about to betray them. Interpreting criticism and looking for concealed

reasons for the actions of others is second nature and necessary to political survival. This level of suspicious conspiracy theorizing is completely foreign to most Westerners.

Karzai is a product of Afghanistan's political culture.⁵ Far from being strange or unbalanced, many of his darkest suspicions and doubts are widely shared by his countrymen. It is also a culture in which motivation is often derived from reasoning who might gain from a particular action. When U.S. actions seemed destructive to prestige or Afghan sovereignty—or simply unfathomable to Afghans—this form of reasoning often led to the most dire assumptions regarding U.S. motivations.

Imbalance in Power Relations

Karzai had no force of his own. He was dependent on the United States to oppose not only insurgents but also armed warlords who dominated Afghanistan's political landscape. His initial government was composed of political factions and rivals for power who greatly limited Karzai's freedom of action. He also lacked money. Initially there were no state revenues to draw on, and even today they are inadequate to Afghanistan's needs. Without force, money, or unified support within the government, the power of appointment to build political support networks was Karzai's only political tool. Some of those appointed were corrupt, but when the United States menaced them, it menaced his entire structure of support.

One constant theme of Afghanistan's history is resistance to rapid, enforced change. This was a fundamental part of the resistance to the first British occupation.⁶ It caused the overthrow of two monarchs and was a key element in Afghan resistance to the domestic communists whose collapsing regime prompted the Soviet invasion. Karzai had many reasons to be cautious in challenging established power relationships within the country. In my years of dealing with him and in the recollections of many others, Karzai was deeply aware of the need to restore Afghan sovereignty in fact as well as in name. Taliban propaganda repeatedly compared Karzai to Shah Shujah, the puppet Afghan ruler the British enthroned in 1839. The tension was constant between the symbolism of his position as president and the reality that power lay elsewhere.

Some aspects of U.S. political culture were also constraints. As David Sedney has remarked, the United States wanted Karzai to be simultaneously "strong and subservient," taking political action with his own people while following our notions of what to do. Our approach was "incapacitating and inconsistent."⁷ The United States operated not only without historical memory, but with a seeming indifference to how often it changed signals. For example, it counseled Karzai to rely on warlords and later demanded he fire them. The confusion this introduced about our purpose contributed to deteriorating relations.

Culture, habits of suspicious thinking, and power imbalances all played their part in adding to mutual antipathy. But these conditions on the Afghan side were present when relations were comparatively harmonious early on and when relations soured. An examination of the relationship's deterioration has to focus on U.S. actions as well as, or in my judgment more than, on Karzai's reactions to the United States.

Early Years

As mentioned above, Hamid Karzai became president with no experience in building institutions. Americans who worked with him in 2002 and 2003 found him trusting, grateful for U.S. help, and optimistic. He expected that with U.S. assistance, a bright future had opened for Afghanistan after years of war. Karzai later called the mood of that period "euphoric."⁸

Initially, Karzai kept having his staff put into speeches the story of a man whose family was killed in a U.S. airstrike, but said it didn't matter so long as the United States stayed to help Afghanistan—a story that underlined Karzai's message to the United States to stay.⁹

Karzai had seen the United States' enormous power rapidly destroy the Taliban. His expectation that the United States would help stabilize the country afterward was disappointed. The disintegration of Afghanistan during the civil war that followed the collapse of the communists showed that warlord power had to be curtailed if the state were to stabilize. But that was not an initial U.S. goal: President George W. Bush had made clear in his campaign that he opposed the United States becoming involved in nationbuilding, and U.S. military goals were to hunt terrorists. This led the United States to oppose the expansion of NATO operations outside Kabul, since this might interfere with counterterrorist operations. Karzai rapidly discovered that he was on his own.

Autonomy of U.S. Military Action

Karzai's first shock came when he requested military support to confront a fractious warlord, Pacha Khan Zadran, who threatened civil war if Karzai did not recognize him as a provincial governor. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld opposed allowing the Afghan government to become dependent on U.S. forces to stay in power.¹⁰ Rumsfeld advised Karzai to use "patronage and political incentives and disincentives to get the warlords, governors and cabinet officials into line."¹¹ Karzai would later be bitterly criticized for this approach, but the United States never took responsibility for the situation. Without U.S. backing Karzai would not even try to crack down on warlords. When discussing the removal of Herat governor Ismail Khan, Karzai would ask those in favor to tell him what he was supposed to do if Ismail Khan refused and "went to the mountains."¹² A 2003 Afghan plan to attack another warlord was blocked by U.S. military fears that it would ignite fighting.¹³

Some efforts to control warlords improved over time. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad was instrumental in getting Ismail Khan to give up his governorship. International efforts to demobilize the heavy arms, tanks, and artillery of the warlords were largely successful, but the subsequent effort to act against the remaining illegally armed groups did not work out.¹⁴

Some U.S. actions seemed to belittle Karzai. When he first visited Washington, he appeared before a congressional committee but was seated like a hearing witness at a table with the congressional representatives in rows above him, suggesting he was in an inferior position. Unnoticed in the United States, the pictures caused criticism in Kabul.¹⁵

One of Karzai's greatest frustrations was over the issue of civilian casualties. He had raised this issue even during the early fighting period, when he asked Special Forces accompanying him in Uruzgan not to call airstrikes on groups of less than three vehicles—even though air strikes had been crucial in preventing large Taliban attacks on his position.¹⁶ In 2002, an airstrike on a wedding party in Uruzgan killed many innocents. The United States was slow to take responsibility.¹⁷ There were more mistaken attacks in subsequent years. In one case, Karzai told the United States that he believed some Afghans were deliberately supplying incorrect information about Taliban forces to settle local scores. Early on, Karzai handled the casualty issue in private conversations and fairly low-key public statements.¹⁸ Later, as more Afghans were killed, public anger began to turn on Karzai, and his outrage became public.¹⁹

Karzai was in constant touch with rural voices. Contacts would telephone him from every corner of Afghanistan. He had no faith in written reports or institutions and often told me that he trusted only what "a good man" told him. He refused to accept that the good man could get something wrong. Tribal delegations came to see him in the hundreds, laying their complaints before him. Sometimes they were valid, sometimes trumped up to get rid of officials who

were cutting into corrupt business. Karzai's bypassing of staff procedures and reliance on such reports to demand action frustrated foreigners. In turn, Karzai was frustrated by his limited power and resources.

Underlying the mutual irritations were often wide gaps in understanding the local politics that influenced Karzai's decisions. This was a two-sided problem. On the one hand, foreigners could be completely indifferent to or ignorant of Afghan political concerns. On the other hand, Karzai would only rarely explain his political worries. In one case, I found Karzai deeply alarmed in 2006 by reports that a village named Chora in Uruzgan would be overwhelmed by the Taliban. The U.S. military had initially rejected Afghan military requests for action, saying that if the Taliban actually took the village they would get it back. I realized that retaking the village would scarcely help Karzai show he was defending his supporters, and subsequently contacted Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry, who understood the political issue and ordered action. However, I would have understood Karzai and the political importance of the village much better if he had told me then, as I learned only years later, that Chora was a village that had sheltered Karzai when he first entered Uruzgan in 2001 with a handful of supporters to oppose the still powerful Taliban.

In another case I had great difficulty getting Karzai to remove a provincial governor who had been convicted of drug smuggling in the United States. The governor's presence in a drug-producing province was a political embarrassment waiting to happen. I understood that the governor's father had some political importance to Karzai, but only much later did I understand that the father was a major political ally who helped cement Karzai's Popalzai tribe in power in Kandahar. Knowing this might not have altered my actions at the time, but in general, Karzai's reluctance to explain his political reasoning, along with a frequent lack of interest by foreign officials, only compounded the mutual irritations.

Relations were fraying over the casualties issue by the end of the Bush administration. Yet for all the actions then that belittled Karzai or undercut his power, relations did not descend to the level of public acrimony that they reached in the Obama years. Part of the difference lay in particular actions of the Obama group. Another reason was that Karzai had a basic level of trust in Bush. Bush as a politician took the view that he had to defer to Karzai's understanding of what the political situation in Afghanistan would support; in short, "Afghanistan can only have one president and Karzai is it."²⁰ This did not mean Karzai was relaxed about differences, but it was my observation that when he felt supported and understood what U.S. officials were doing and thinking, he was at his best, made his strongest decisions, and acted most confidently.

Pakistan

Pakistan remained a huge problem and a matter of growing suspicion as Karzai saw the United States unable to articulate a useful policy. Early on, Pakistan denied that there were Taliban in Pakistan. In 2006, I watched as infiltration into Afghanistan increased several fold. Repeated Western statements that the war could only be ended politically ignored the fact that this was true only if one could do nothing about the Pakistani sanctuaries.

Karzai could never understand why the United States did not press Pakistan harder. I and later ambassadors found it difficult to explain, since Washington was unable to find a way to balance its distaste for Pakistani sanctuaries for the insurgents with its need for Pakistani cooperation to get U.S. military supplies into Afghanistan. Later, Karzai came to believe that we were condoning or even aiding Pakistan to keep Afghanistan weak.

In one case, Karzai was outraged by a statement by Pakistani general Ali Mohammad Jan Orakzai, then governor of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, that the Taliban was acquiring the status of a national resistance against foreign occupation of Afghanistan. However,

instead of instantly denouncing Pakistan, he stayed quiet for two days. This was because I was in touch with our ambassador in Islamabad, Ryan Crocker, and briefed Karzai on what we were doing to get Pakistan to issue a correction. When that effort failed to move Pakistan, I called Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, who called Pakistan's ambassador, and again I was able to keep Karzai informed. Finally, he felt he had to respond to public pressure and speak out, but even then he allowed me to see the draft statement and I was able to tone it down.²¹

Karzai was less effective when he felt himself under attack and particularly when he was unsure of U.S. support. One case was after riots in Kabul in May 2006, when everything seemed on the brink of crumbling. As in this case, when Karzai was unsure of support, and especially when he doubted the United States, he was at his worst. He blamed others, hesitated to make any decisions, and imagined wild conspiracies against him. Under the Obama administration, Washington put him in exactly this position and kept him there for the rest of his tenure.

The Obama Administration

The Obama administration came into office faced with a deteriorating military situation and a determination to handle things differently from its predecessor. The first few months were marked by considerable confusion. The new national security advisor, General James Jones, was trying to figure out how to get traction with the different factions that took office around Hillary Clinton, Obama himself, Vice President Joseph Biden, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, along with Department of Defense holdovers. The old and new National Security Council Afghan teams did not meet until January 12, 2009.²² It was anything but a situation for sending clear signals about U.S. policy.²³

The first review of Afghan policy for the new administration, handled by former Central Intelligence Agency officer Bruce Riedel with a few others, was done very rapidly. The second review, in the fall, took months. Neither had much coordination with the Afghans. Eikenberry in his leaked cable was correct that Karzai did not agree with the shift to counterinsurgency, which he thought would lead to the impression of a legitimate resistance opposed to a corrupt government sustained by foreign, infidel troops.²⁴ For Karzai the emphasis should have been on controlling Pakistan; without that, gains in the villages would be unsustainable.²⁵

The Bush administration's goals in Afghanistan had gradually expanded. The Obama administration was correct that more limited goals were necessary, but its final policy was contradictory. It declared there would be no nationbuilding but then funded massive increases in assistance focused on elements that were part of such operations. These decisions also greatly increased the creation of parallel structures of government, especially in crucial districts. The Afghans had little visibility on what was being done. The general disdain for Kabul was represented by a statement I heard frequently in 2010 in my provincial travels: "Kabul doesn't matter." This was nonsense, since Kabul could remove local officials at will, and did so, to the irritation of the coalition.

In 2010, the surge of troops, civilians, and money was in full swing, but strategic goals were muddled by the White House's declaration of a timeline for achieving progress and beginning withdrawal. After a May 2010 trip to Kandahar and Helmand, I told General Stanley McChrystal that while everyone spoke of needing significant progress by 2011, there was no definition of what this meant or what would happen if it were achieved—or not achieved. If we did not know how to define progress for ourselves, how could we expect the Afghans to understand?²⁶

Karzai did not agree with the Obama administration's policies and was increasingly resentful and suspicious of U.S. intentions toward him. Karzai's suspicions had already been raised by the preinauguration visit of then Senator Joe Biden. Biden's strong criticism of corruption in the Afghan government was made at dinner with Karzai and the Afghan cabinet. Karzai fell

back on unconvincing denials. The dinner ended with Biden putting down his napkin—some said throwing it down—and leaving the dinner. Biden’s criticisms had a great deal of validity, but to attack the Afghan president in front of his cabinet was offensive. Worse, in an Afghan context, no friend would attack a friend in this manner unless the attacker were signaling hostility. Thus, the fact of the attack, and not its substance, created deep suspicions in Karzai and among many Afghans.²⁷

The sense of hostility was cemented during the first visit of the new Special Representative for Afghanistan (SRAP), Richard Holbrooke. In a meeting with United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan head Kai Eide after Holbrooke’s visit, Karzai reportedly said, “He wants to get rid of you and of me.”²⁸ “Holbrooke left a sour mess,” said former Afghan ambassador to the United States Said Jawad. Karzai was convinced the United States was against him.²⁹ He was not alone. Holbrooke’s activities before and during the 2009 Afghan presidential election seemed to many Afghan observers to carry unmistakable hostility toward Karzai. His and Ambassador Eikenberry’s public meetings with opposition candidates were taken as a clear sign that the United States was opposed to the Afghan president.³⁰

Holbrooke claimed to be simply “supporting a robust and credible election.”³¹ Holbrooke was against Karzai from early on,³² but whether he thought his tactics would lead to Karzai’s downfall or simply force Karzai to accede to U.S. demands remains unknown. Gates refers to Holbrooke’s approach to the opposition as “our clumsy and failed putsch” but leaves unclear whether this was a Washington policy or Holbrooke’s decision.³³ In any event, many Afghans believed deeply that the United States had covertly funded Karzai’s first election in 2004. Whether true or not, this combined with the long experience of foreign intervention in Afghan affairs made Afghans inclined to see foreign hands behind every statement and action.³⁴ Eide notes that several Afghans told him Holbrooke encouraged them to run for the presidency.³⁵ Many of them reported the conversations to Karzai to show their loyalty, thus further enflaming his sense of a conspiracy against him.³⁶

The 2009 election in Afghanistan became a bruising battle of wills. The international community reacted in horror to the widespread fraud. Karzai’s view was that the United States intervened to try to unseat him. The fraud on his behalf—which he never acknowledged—was a counter to foreign intervention. The U.S. insistence on holding a runoff election, because Karzai fell short of the 50 percent vote the Afghan constitution required, was an effort to weaken and delegitimize him. Karzai’s view that he won a significant victory had some foundation. Even when the international election officials discounted millions of votes, his margin of victory was approximately 17 percent in a field of forty candidates.³⁷

Karzai’s impression of what the United States was doing was both fomented by those around him and supported by many Afghans who had no contact with him. The issue of the runoff was also an example of a massive cultural gap. For Westerners following rules, the constitution provided a basic definition of justice and proper behavior. Many Afghans had no similar experience. In nearly three decades of war, there had been no justice system. The powerful had either manipulated or ignored the rules. In conversations with Afghans, I frequently found mystification about why we were insisting on the runoff. Afghans believed the runoff was expensive and dangerous, and Karzai would win anyway. I explained that it was the law. They responded that it would change nothing. The perception gap was enormous. There was no way any Western government could have supported ignoring the Afghan constitution, and there was no way that Karzai was going to believe that our actions were motivated only by rules.

To Karzai, the foreign pressure appeared designed to reduce his mandate, delegitimize him, and make him look like a puppet to his own people. That Holbrooke raised the need for a runoff even before the votes were counted only deepened Karzai’s suspicion.³⁸ One senior international official said that by 2011, Karzai was bitter. He saw the United States as having

tried to remove him and never forgot or forgave.³⁹ Rangin Dadfar Spanta, who was close to Karzai and served as both Afghan national security advisor and foreign minister, made clear to me in numerous conversations over the years that while Karzai could put the incident behind him intellectually, it remained a raw emotional wound that would not heal.⁴⁰

One senior U.S. official who had observed Karzai over the years commented that by 2011 the trust between him and the United States had evaporated. The relationship had “chunks bitten out of it.”⁴¹ Kai Eide reflects extensively on the same point.⁴² There were many specific issues of friction and misunderstanding on both sides, but the events of the 2009 election remained a constant factor. Karzai’s suspicion was a filter through which he viewed every issue, seeking constantly for sinister interpretations.

As noted earlier, the Bush administration had made many decisions that undermined Afghan sovereignty and caused controversy. Karzai’s suspicion was growing then, but never reached the degree that it did under the Obama administration. Some of the differences lay in specifics, including measures deemed essential to salvage a losing war. But personal frictions worsened everything.

The Obama administration came into office convinced that the regular video conferences between Bush and Karzai were a mistake. There may have been something to this, but the new administration had an exaggerated idea of the frequency of such exchanges. John Wood recalls only seven or eight in 2008 (although there might have been a few more), but certainly not weekly, as the new team believed.⁴³ Coming without explanation and in the context of the Biden meeting and Holbrooke’s behavior, the decision to limit contact with Obama only deepened Karzai’s belief that the new administration was against him.

The high-handed and, in Afghan views, insulting behavior continued. Reflecting on Karzai’s first visit to the new administration in 2009, then Finance Minister Omar Zakhilwal, who was in the meeting, said:

Obama talked and was not respectful. He gave Karzai a lecture. It was very bad. During the visit in 2010 they tried to go to the other extreme, but it was too late.⁴⁴

When President Obama visited Afghanistan in 2012 to sign the just negotiated Strategic Partnership Agreement, his private meeting with Karzai was frosty and, in Afghan views, impolite. Afghans put great store on hospitality. Having a meal together is considered a duty of both host and guest. “He refused even to take a glass of water in the Palace,” an outraged Dr. Spanta told me some time after the visit.⁴⁵ Others confirmed the story to me.

There were attempts to repair the relationship during Karzai’s visits to Washington in 2010 and 2012. Unfortunately, the efforts at politeness were too late and not consistent. Obama’s last visit to Afghanistan during Karzai’s tenure on May 27, 2014, appeared deliberately insulting. When he landed at the vast U.S. base at Bagram the winds made flying on to Kabul dangerous for his plane. He invited Karzai to meet him in Bagram. Whether Karzai believed the reasons, he reacted angrily to the perception that he should to come to a U.S. base, with all the public symbolism that Karzai was a vassal under the command of his U.S. masters. Karzai’s refusal to attend drew strong and public Afghan support. Presidential candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah said Karzai not going to Bagram was “respectful to the people of Afghanistan.”⁴⁶

Numerous factors after 2009 aggravated the personal coldness between Karzai and Obama. On the U.S. side, there were mixed messages, lack of clarity, and changed signals. Meanwhile, Karzai was increasingly surrounded by sycophants who promoted themselves by wild conspiratorial theorizing about the United States. Even many Afghans who agreed with Karzai on substance disagreed with his resulting emotional and public outbursts. Karzai’s increasingly public tirades and accusations, many of which were completely untrue, angered U.S. officials and made it less likely that they would try to repair the breach. The outrageous charge in January

2014 that the United States was behind Taliban attacks was only one of many such outbursts.⁴⁷ Karzai responded in kind:

Perhaps my public statements are something that they don't like, perhaps they feel that the president of a poor country like Afghanistan that is so much dependent—how dare he speaks. If that is the attitude, then, of course, they are wrong....We are still a nation....We have interests like any other society.⁴⁸

Despite all the anger and wounded feelings, Karzai never actually sought a break in relations.

Civilian Casualties Again

As previously mentioned, Afghan civilian casualties were a repeated issue during the Bush administration. In 2008, civilian casualties increased; although largely the result of Taliban action, a UN report held that nearly 40 percent of the casualties resulted from coalition action.⁴⁹ Karzai visited the scene of a particularly nasty killing of a wedding party in 2008. Early U.S. accounts of the incident were not true; Karzai boiled over. Then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called him and threatened that if he did not stop criticizing the United States it would negatively affect the bilateral relationship.⁵⁰ After seven years he was not prepared to discuss the matter in private.⁵¹

Karzai's public comments became more strident, however, and U.S. anger at the criticism ratcheted up in turn. Karzai's bitterness was fully displayed to Kai Eide when he said of the United States that it "treated us as insects." General McChrystal felt Karzai's concerns were often correct and made a determined effort to reduce accidental casualties. He issued restrictive guidelines that his own troops sometimes criticized.

It was the civilian casualties that drove him crazy. He was convinced that it would cause us to lose. "You're creating so much hate and ill will that we will lose the war," he told McChrystal.⁵²

McChrystal made progress in convincing Karzai he was trying to control the situation.⁵³ However, the relationship cooled after McChrystal's departure and the arrival of General David Petraeus, whom Karzai found "intimidating."⁵⁴ After a February 2011 Special Forces attack, Afghan sources alleged that Petraeus claimed the Afghans had burned their own children. Whatever was said, the Afghans were deeply offended and found Petraeus's statements "deeply shocking" and "really absurd."⁵⁵

As Karzai railed against U.S. tactics, the 2011 Kabul Bank scandal worsened.⁵⁶ Karzai thought the United States had hidden the problem from him to weaken him. He was under great pressure to act against political associates. One senior international official told me that he thought that while Karzai's unhappiness about casualties was genuine, he was also exploiting the issue to shift the focus of public opinion to support for Afghan sovereignty. Both may be true. As a master of political theater, Karzai was extremely adept at going on the offensive when he wanted to change the subject. His genuine anger at civilian casualties, however, was well established.

Night Raids and Detainees

Coalition commanders regarded the night raids by Special Forces as one of the most effective tools at their command. At a tactical level they disrupted the insurgency. But many early raids were uncoordinated even with local coalition commanders, who often objected to them as politically negative.⁵⁷ Many Afghans found the foreign intrusion into women's living spaces to

be deeply offensive and the spectacle of Afghan men hooded and bound in front of their families to be humiliating. Gradually more of the raids were led by specially trained Afghan forces, but Karzai refused to see a difference and lashed out at his own commanders as U.S. puppets. Gradually, after numerous public battles, Karzai won control and virtually halted the raids, a decision his successor President Mohammed Ashraf Ghani has reversed.

Part of Karzai's frustration was driven by his belief that the coalition should be fighting the sanctuaries in Pakistan instead of Afghan villages, where they might turn the population against the government. ISAF commanders saw his public outbursts as unbalanced, since his public condemnation of Taliban atrocities was far more restrained. The high decibel public controversy continued with growing bitterness on both sides.

Another long running complication was controversy over holding Afghan detainees. From 2005 onward the United States attempted to negotiate a greater handover of detainees to the Afghan government. The sticking point was that the United States insisted that the Afghans had to guarantee that they would hold detainees judged to be a danger if they returned to the battlefield. Afghan laws provided no legal way to guarantee this. Prisoners could only be held if convicted of crimes, and evidence that would meet civilian prosecution requirements was often not available or required disclosure of sensitive intelligence. The bitter experience of illegal detention under the communists and warlords of the past made Afghan politicians allergic to introducing new laws to resolve the problem.

Periodically the issue seemed to be resolved. A detainee agreement was reached as part of the negotiations for the Strategic Partnership Agreement. However, the issue later erupted in political controversy with both sides feeling the agreement was not being honored. Coalition fears of danger to their forces were well founded. Karzai never accepted that there were two legitimate sides to the argument. It was sovereignty against military necessity, and his increasing bitterness and outspoken criticism was not helpful to finding a solution. It simply became one more item in a long list of grievances.

Confusion Becomes Certainty

Underlying the personal frictions, particular issues, and sense of infringement of Afghan sovereignty was general Afghan confusion over the purpose of U.S. policy. From 2009 on, even as Karzai felt that he was being attacked, undermined, and delegitimized by the Obama administration, he kept asking about U.S. purposes, and finding no solid answers, developed his own ideas. In 2010 I found Karzai already beginning to voice theories that would ripen into certainty. "I think what you want is for Afghanistan and Pakistan to be failed states," he said, "buffer states so that you can use them to wage a war against terrorism and as a way to block China's expansion."

By 2011 the situation was worse. On March 14, Karzai said that he had no idea what the United States' long term purpose was in Afghanistan or what it intended to do. Karzai was angry and suspicious that there was a U.S. plan for Afghanistan being concealed from him. He said his problem was not with our immediate actions but our long-term intentions. Our policy shift from counterterrorism to counterinsurgency, and from leaving in 2011 to departing in 2014, had convinced him that the United States had ulterior motives. He interpreted U.S. anticorruption efforts as a direct attack on his political network, meant to weaken him. I had begun to hear similar ideas from Afghans as early as 2007. If the United States could win the war of 2001 in a few weeks, then the dragging on of the current insurgency could only be because the United States wanted it, as an excuse to keep its forces in country.

And yet, at the end of the same conversation, Karzai assured me that he wanted good relations with the United States:

My job is to have a better future for Afghanistan, I want Afghanistan to have a better relationship with the US, but I don't understand what you want. Afghans can take suffering if they know where they are going. But I can't tell Afghans where we are going....Why do you undermine me all the time?⁵⁸

That evening I heard the same confusion from former ministers who had all moved into strong opposition to Karzai. Dr. Abdullah, former rural development minister Mohammad Ihsan Zia, former minister of interior Hanif Atmar, and others all said they did not understand U.S. policy and called for a clear statement of our goals.⁵⁹ The situation was no better on the strategic level when I returned in November 2011. Although Karzai's personal relations with Ambassador Crocker and General John Allen were much better than had been the case with their predecessors, Karzai was as confused about our strategic intentions as he had been eight months before.

Negotiating with the Taliban

By the end of 2011 the United States had begun seeking direct talks with the Taliban, which were intended to move into talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. One senior Afghan official close to Karzai said the president believed we were trying to have separate talks with the Taliban to arrange our withdrawal from Afghanistan. Karzai would later tell a senior U.S. official that he would accept a prisoner swap, but he had to be the one to lead reconciliation talks.⁶⁰ Karzai wanted very much to be the one to make peace with the Taliban. Some of his critical statements, and release of prisoners the United States thought dangerous, may have been part of this, as were his constant suspicions of what the United States was trying to do.

Marc Grossman, who replaced Holbrooke as special representative after Holbrooke's death, tried constantly to show Karzai that the United States was being transparent. Upon appointment Grossman made a special trip to London to meet with Karzai. He later cancelled a meeting with the Taliban in Doha when Karzai objected.⁶¹ However, the Taliban effort to talk with the United States and not with the Kabul government or its High Peace Council reinforced Karzai's suspicions that that he would be cut out and that the Taliban would gain recognition as a legitimate alternative government. He voiced the same concern regarding the U.S. shift to a counterinsurgency policy. He feared that using the word insurgency would convey the impression that the Taliban was a legitimate domestic opposition and thus delegitimize the Kabul government. These suspicions reached fever pitch before the planned June 2013 opening of a Taliban office in Doha, Qatar.

Karzai demanded and received a written promise from President Obama that the Doha office would exist only as a location for peace negotiations, not as an embassy with a flag. In a meeting I had with Karzai a week before the office opened, he voiced his fear that we would recognize the Taliban as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan—in Karzai's view, conceding that they were a legitimate insurgency. That would make the United States into an occupier and the Kabul government only its puppet. If this happened he intended to suspend negotiations for a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA).⁶² When the Taliban violated their agreement by raising their flag and designating the office as that of the Islamic Emirate, Karzai was deeply angered. He suspended BSA discussions and refused to accept that the United States had acted sloppily but in good faith and that the Taliban actions were only their own. How the United States could fail to make sure the government of Qatar fully implemented President Obama's guarantee was something Karzai could not understand. He found U.S. explanations unconvincing.

Maintaining the Relationship

Despite frictions, suspicions, and outbursts, Karzai had worked previously to conclude a Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA). He was difficult and negotiated hard. In November 2013, he called for a *loya jirga* (popular assembly) to discuss the SPA. There was considerable NATO nervousness about this, with some wondering whether it would cause negotiations to break down or even whether Karzai would use it to take positions on issues such as night raids so rigid that a solution would be impossible.⁶³

However, Karzai had earlier privately told senior U.S. officials not to worry; he knew how to manage the meeting and would support the SPA.⁶⁴ He fulfilled this promise. Some in the West thought his blistering attack in his speech against night raids in Afghan villages was a threat to the SPA.⁶⁵ In Kabul, where I was visiting, these theatrics got no Afghan attention; none of my Afghan interlocutors even noted this aspect of Karzai's speech. He had charged the *loya jirga* to focus on only two questions: approval of the concept of the SPA and of peace negotiations. Attendees ignored the histrionics and returned the approval Karzai had told U.S. officials he would obtain. The successful conclusion of the SPA was far more telling than public speeches as evidence that Karzai wanted to maintain his strategic relationship with the United States.

No Trust

Mutual lack of trust continued to bedevil the relationship. The more Karzai felt endangered and undermined, the more he tightened his ties with his political supporters, many of whom were corrupt and the source of the bad governance that gave so much support to the Taliban. But without trust it was impossible to convince Karzai to fire his supporters.

Karzai remembered that during the Bush administration the United States had not only built up the warlords but advised Karzai to do the same. That the United States focused only on Afghan and not U.S. corruption—by which he meant both Afghan corruption in implementing U.S. assistance and actual corruption of U.S. officials and contractors—struck Karzai as hypocritical, and evidence that U.S. criticism was politically motivated. It took the United States eleven years to form a task force that discovered corruption in U.S. military contracting and payoffs to the Taliban by Afghan subcontractors—both matters Karzai had alleged for years. Karzai shared a common Afghan perception of seeing similarities between the mansions being built by contractors and drug lords and attributing them all to corruption.⁶⁶ He saw U.S. efforts to get him to take action against individual officials as politically motivated and intended to weaken him, a point he had made explicitly with me in 2011. The U.S. focus on Afghan corruption was right about its effects, but the approach was only making it more difficult to find a solution. Karzai's approach was also counterproductive. His protecting corruption that fueled the insurgency and meeting criticism with criticism only angered U.S. officials.

In May 2013, Spanta told me that while everyone was extremely happy about the SPA—real estate prices in Kabul increased massively on news of the signing—Karzai's bitterness was so deep that no more than minimal changes in positions could be expected for the duration of Karzai's tenure.⁶⁷ Karzai's views had hardened particularly after his January 2013 visit to Washington. In side discussions with key National Security Council (NSC) and White House staff, the Afghan delegation was told that after 2014 the Taliban would no longer be considered a U.S. enemy; even if the Taliban attacked Kabul, the United States would intervene only if the U.S. embassy or coalition forces were in danger. The Afghans were astounded, as several Afghans present told me later. Perhaps the statements were only an attempt to explain the White House's position that the fighting would be entirely up to the Afghans after 2014, but Karzai and his delegation were still deeply shocked when I talked to

them two months later. Only twenty-two months later did the White House agree to allow U.S. air support after 2014 for Afghan troops in great danger.⁶⁸

In March 2013, Karzai told me he finally understood U.S. policy, which was to deliberately let fighting go on and keep Afghanistan weak in order to have a reason to have bases in the country. Americans who understood how little the administration wanted bases and how much it wanted to leave could not credit that such a belief was real. To Afghans it seemed logical. If the war was clearly going to continue and the United States, as the White House had told him, was going to stop fighting the Taliban after 2014, then maintaining military bases was the only explanation he could find for this seeming lack of U.S. logic. That the White House simply wanted to justify ending U.S. combat operations and withdrawing the bulk of its forces did not fit Karzai's understanding of our actions. That officially ending the war in Afghanistan was a matter of U.S. domestic politics made no sense to Karzai, who saw the reality of the continuing struggle in his country. How could the United States fight the Taliban as an enemy in 2014 but declare that it would no longer be an enemy in 2015? The United States must have a deeper purpose for keeping the war going and keeping him weak. Finally, after years of speculation and doubt, he believed that he had penetrated our "real" policy.

When Karzai enflamed Americans by saying during Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel's March 2013 visit that the Taliban were killing Afghan civilians "in service to America," he was referring directly to his belief that the war was continuing because it served U.S. interests.⁶⁹ The disastrous White House meeting was probably behind Karzai's statement eleven months later that U.S. officials "deem suicide bombings and attacks on schools by the terrorist in Afghanistan not acts of terror from the perspective of the United States."⁷⁰

Karzai made clear to me and many others that he was prepared to grant us military bases, but on the condition that we respect Afghan sovereignty and pay for them. This misunderstanding deepened as the United States pressed hard for a BSA. It was true that NATO needed a new security agreement to give legal standing to NATO's force presence after 2014 because the NATO security agreement was time limited. However, this was not true of the United States.

Karzai knew that the legal basis for our forces was contained in a two-page exchange of diplomatic notes signed in 2002. This simple document gave our forces complete legal protection and had no expiration date, although either party could terminate it by written notice. The repeated White House statements that we would have to withdraw after December 31, 2014, in the absence of a new agreement were not true.⁷¹ There were many reasons on both sides to want a new and better agreement, but legal necessity was not one of them.

On June 10, 2013, Karzai expanded on his views to me. If Afghanistan could find security and monetary reward from an agreement, he would agree to it. He used the analogy of a two-story house. The family—Afghanistan—was on the ground floor and happy to rent the second floor with a separate entrance to a tenant, the United States. Afghanistan would agree to not scrutinize activities on their floor so long as the United States did not concern itself with Afghans' doings, including their bickering or "whether their cooking is smelly." It was a wonderfully telling analogy, except that he was wrong about how much we wanted to "rent the second floor."⁷²

Karzai's conviction that we desperately wanted the BSA led him to believe that he had a strong negotiating position. He may also have believed that we intended to intervene in the 2014 election and that by withholding agreement for the BSA he had a lever to keep us from intervening. When I saw him shortly before the elections in March 2014, he was seeing signs of our intervention everywhere. He thought that news stories that Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassoul could only get into the runoff by fraud were a deliberate indication of our maneuvering. I pointed out that the stories came from Dr. Abdullah's camp, but I could not shake his conviction. At that point we were almost mirror images of each other. The United States was

convinced that Karzai would intervene to control the election by fraud, and Karzai swore that he would not intervene while being convinced that we would do so.⁷³

The U.S. approach to BSA negotiations kept confirming Karzai's belief about how much the United States valued the agreement. The United States announced that the BSA had to be completed by October. When that deadline passed, it set another and then another, announcing that it was prepared to wait until after the election for the next Afghan president to sign. One senior U.S. official after another trooped to Kabul to try to persuade Karzai to sign.⁷⁴ Every American and many Afghans who tried to explain to Karzai that the White House wanted to withdraw from Afghanistan was brushed off as being fooled by U.S. bargaining techniques. That Karzai interpreted what he saw in terms of his own culture—where threats to leave are part of bargaining—was not unnatural, except to outsiders who could never seem to fathom that not everyone saw the world as the United States did, particularly an Afghan who had no personal experience of Washington. The result was increasing bitterness from both sides.⁷⁵ Karzai's decision during this period to release detainees that the United States regarded as dangerous may have been an effort to pressure the United States, part of his effort to engage the Taliban in talks, or undertaken for other reasons, but the issues intersected and the bitter statements from both sides added to the miserable atmosphere.

The BSA negotiations dragged on throughout the end of Karzai's tenure. A further *loya jirga* was called to consider the matter. There was great suspicion about Karzai's motives for calling this assembly. Whatever his plan, the assembly strongly endorsed signing the BSA. The major presidential candidates publicly declared their willingness to sign if elected. Karzai never opposed the BSA but did not sign. Whether this was simply his desire not to be the Afghan leader who legitimated a continued foreign military presence or for some other reason is unclear. Whatever the matter, he was convinced that we would not leave and so felt free to be obdurate.

Lessons for the Future

Hamid Karzai is now a former president, influential but no longer the Afghan decision maker. Some problems in our relationship with Karzai were matters of his own suspicions, character, and lack of understanding of how his actions affected Washington thinking. He was increasingly paranoid about U.S. conspiracies and tolerant of rapacious governance that alienated Afghans. But Karzai's failings were steadily exacerbated by unclear and changing U.S. policies, a frequent disconnection between stated U.S. policies and actions and a blindness to how Afghanistan perceived statements by U.S. officials.

Many reasons for the poor relations were personal; as Karzai became more convinced that the United States was against him, his behavior became increasingly erratic and his suspicions more fantastic. But many problems were structural and hold lessons for the future:

- **Tension over parallel structures:** The Afghan government's desire for control over what foreigners do in their country has become increasingly widespread, particularly as it is a long-held Ghani position.⁷⁶ On the other hand, donors have legitimate concerns about oversight. This tension will continue and great care will need to be taken to find compromises.
- **Policy clarity:** Afghans will continue to orient behavior toward what they understand the United States intends to do. When U.S. policy shifts position frequently or dithers for extended periods, it causes confusion and stimulates conspiracy theories.
- **Speaking with one voice:** Multiple senior U.S. visitors offer mixed messages. If senior officials visit frequently, there is little reason to settle difficult matters with the ambassador or commanding general. The incentive becomes one of refusing settlement and waiting for the next, more senior visitor.

- **Afghan politics, the pace of change, and managing expectations:** Afghanistan is still a country full of separate power centers. Ghani and Abdullah will have to manage an incredibly difficult process of expanding state control without triggering greater opposition than they can handle. Underlying the power politics is a deeply conservative culture. A constant effort to understand what reforms can reasonably be demanded in terms of Afghan politics and domestic pressures is going to be required to manage the relationship.
- **Listening well:** The deterioration of relations with Karzai was worsened by his frustration that he was not listened to, year after year. Public denunciation and private suspicion resulted. The United States will need to listen to Ghani and Abdullah just as they will need to make the effort to understand U.S. positions.
- **Suspicion of Pakistan:** Karzai's suspicion of Pakistani conspiracy might be extreme but is not unique among Afghans. His anti-Pakistani views—and belief in U.S. leverage over Pakistan—were within the mainstream of Afghan thinking. If Ghani's effort to get Pakistani help with peace negotiations is not successful, the problems with interpreting U.S. policy could well reemerge.

The Karzai period is over, but structural and political factors evident in it can still provide lessons to help guide our future relations with President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Abdullah. The stakes are too important not to learn them.

A constant effort to understand what reforms can reasonably be demanded in terms of Afghan politics and domestic pressures is going to be required to manage the relationship.

Notes

1. Kai Eide, "Afghanistan and the US; Between Partnership and Occupation," Peace Research Institute Oslo (PIRO), 2014, available at www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=7578 (accessed May 5, 2015).
2. NATO/ISAF refers to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces in Afghanistan including the non-NATO country troop contributors. For complicated reason the force was generally referred to as either the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) or NATO/ISAF, but was one force and after 2006 under one command.
3. Eide, "Between Partnership and Occupation," 34.
4. To note only a few works on Afghan culture, see Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012). G. Whitney Azoy's *Buzkashi: Game and Power in Afghanistan* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2012) contains very useful insights into the way in which power is lost or gained through prestige.
5. Former Afghan minister of interior Ali Jilali describes Karzai's leadership style as based on tribalism, factional power of resistance leaders, and democracy, the values of which he cherished while having "no faith in its institutions." See Elizabeth Rubin, "Karzai in His Labyrinth," *New York Times Magazine*, August 4, 2009.
6. William Dalrymple, *Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan 1839–42* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).
7. David Sedney was twice the deputy chief of mission in Kabul and later deputy assistant secretary of defense for Afghanistan. Interview, January 5, 2015.
8. Eide, "Between Partnership and Occupation," 5.
9. Recounted by former Afghan ambassador to the U.S. Said Jawad, January 8, 2015.
10. Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), 406.
11. Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 408.
12. Jawad, January 8, 2015.
13. Interview with former minister of interior Ali Jalali, February 12, 2015.
14. The second program was still a major focus when I arrived in Kabul but failed due to limited intelligence and the lack of military power to compel obedience.
15. Sedney, January 5, 2015.
16. Bette Dam, *A Man and a Motorcycle: How Hamid Karzai Came to Power* (Utrecht: Ipso Facto Press, 2014), 146.
17. Sedney, January 5, 2015.
18. Private conversations with former senior U.S. officials present at the time.
19. Eide, "Between Partnership and Occupation," 24; Dexter Filkins, "Flaws in U.S. Air War Left Hundreds of Civilians Dead," *New York Times*, July 21, 2002.
20. Interview with former NSC director for Afghanistan John Wood, December 12, 2014.
21. For a fuller description, see Ronald Neumann, *The Other War: Winning and Losing in Afghanistan* (College Park, MD: Potomac Books 2009), 185–86.
22. Wood, December 12, 2014.
23. *Ibid.*; Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 350 makes the same point of a White House team divided into many clashing camps.
24. "Ambassador Eikenberry's Cables on U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, available at documents.nytimes.com/eikenberry-s-memos-on-the-strategy-in-afghanistan (accessed May 7, 2015); private conversations with former U.S. officials.
25. Karl Eikenberry, "The Limits of Counterinsurgency Doctrine in Afghanistan: The Other Side of the COIN," *Foreign Affairs* (September–October 2013).
26. From a May 19, 2010, memo to General McChrystal jointly signed by myself and my traveling companions Anthony Cordesman and Michael O'Hanlon.
27. I heard about the incident from many Americans and Afghans. The NSC staff heard that the dinner had been a disaster (Wood, December 12, 2014). Bob Woodward in *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 67–70, presumably reflecting his briefings from Biden, shows no comprehension by either Woodward or his sources of the Afghan perception that made the attack so counterproductive.
28. Kai Eide, interview, December 2, 2015.
29. Said Jawad, interview, January 8, 2015.
30. Scott Smith, "The Bull in Afghanistan's China Shop," *Foreign Policy*, March 27, 2013, available at foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/27/the-bull-in-afghanistans-china-shop/ (accessed May 7, 2015).
31. Interview with former SRAP staffer Vikram Singh, January 12, 2015.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Gates, *Duty*, 358–59. Karzai, as he and others close to him have told me, took Gates's book to be the final confirmation that the policy was deliberate.
34. These suspicions and beliefs were a staple of my numerous conversations with Afghan friends, both those close to Karzai and many who opposed him, throughout 2009.
35. Eide, "Between Partnership and Occupation," 28, and Smith, "The Bull."
36. Background briefing, senior international official, January 2015.
37. April 2011 private meeting with Karzai.
38. Eide, "Between Partnership and Occupation," 29, and interview, December 2, 2014.
39. Private conversation, January 2015.
40. I saw Spanta regularly from 2010 through 2014.
41. Private conversation, January 2015.

42. Eide, "Between Partnership and Occupation," 28; senior former international and U.S. officials on background in discussions of January 2015.
43. Wood, December 12, 2014.
44. Eide, "Between Partnership and Occupation," 29.
45. Spanta, conversation of May 13, 2012.
46. Jim White, "Did Obama's Handling of Karzai When Visiting Kabul Put Bilateral Security Agreement at Risk?" *Emptywheel* (blog), May 28, 2014, available at www.emptywheel.net/2014/05/28/did-obamas-handling-of-karzai-when-visiting-kabul-put-bilateral-security-agreement-at-risk/ (accessed May 7, 2015).
47. Kevin Sieff, "Karzai Suspects U.S. Is Behind Insurgent-Style Attacks, Afghan Officials Say," *Washington Post*, January 27, 2014.
48. "Karzai Defends Afghan Interests," *Sunday Times*, January 27, 2014.
49. UNAMA, "Afghanistan: Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts," Kabul, 2008 and 2009.
50. Eide, "Between Partnership and Occupation," 25, and private conversations.
51. Carlotta Gall, *The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan 2001–2014* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2014), 218, and Ali Jilali, interview.
52. General Stanley McChrystal, interview, January 30, 2015.
53. Eide, "Between Partnership and Occupation," 26.
54. *Ibid.*
55. Joshua Partlow, "Petraeus's Comments on Coalition Attack Reportedly Offend Karzai Government," *Washington Post*, February 25, 2011; Joshua Partlow and Habib Zohori, "Afghan Officials Allege that 65 Civilians Were Killed in U.S. Military Operation," *Washington Post*, February 21, 2011.
56. Alissa J. Rubin and James Risen, "Losses at Afghan Bank Could Be \$900 Million," *New York Times*, January 30, 2011.
57. I heard this complaint frequently. The problem of a divided chain of command with some counterterrorist forces not being under the commanding general in Afghanistan was not resolved until General McChrystal took command in 2009.
58. From a March 14, 2011, memo of my meeting.
59. From my notes, written April 3, 2011.
60. Private conversation with former senior U.S. official, January 2015.
61. Background conversation with former senior official involved in the negotiations, January 2015.
62. My notes, June 10, 2013.
63. From my notes written in the evenings of the visit.
64. Background discussion in 2015 with then senior U.S. official.
65. Jon Boone, "Hamid Karzai Tells Loya Jirga: No U.S. Military Pact until Night Raids Cease," *Guardian*, November 16, 2011.
66. Eide, "Between Partnership and Occupation," 23.
67. My notes, May 13, 2012.
68. Mark Mazzetti and Eric Schmitt, "In a Shift, Obama Extends U.S. Role in Afghan Combat," *New York Times*, November 21, 2014.
69. Dion Nissenbaum and Yaroslav Trofimov, "Karzai Inflames U.S. Tensions: Afghan President's Claim Taliban Kill 'In Service to America' Clouds Hagel Visit," *Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 2013.
70. Sharif Hassanyar, "Karzai Criticizes U.S. Definition of 'Terrorism,'" *Tolo News*, December 22, 2013.
71. See, for example, "U.S. Wants Afghanistan to Sign Security Deal in 'Coming Weeks,'" *Economic Times*, January 30, 2014.
72. From my notes written the same day.
73. From my notes of March 21, 2014.
74. See, for example, Patrick Goodenough, "Susan Rice: Obama Will Not Send Letter of Apology to Afghanistan," *CNSnews.com*, November 20, 2013, available at cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/susan-rice-obama-will-not-send-letter-apology-afghanistan (accessed May 7, 2015); Agence France-Press, "John Kerry in Afghanistan to Push to Keep U.S. Troops in the Country after 2014," October 11, 2013, available at www.rawstory.com/rs/2013/10/john-kerry-in-afghanistan-to-push-to-keep-u-s-troops-in-the-country-after-2014/ (accessed May 7, 2015); Sayed Tareq Majidi, "BSA Signing Delay Costly, Undermines Trust: Dobbins," *Tolo News*, March 1, 2014, available at www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/14037-bsa-signing-delay-costly-undermines-trust-dobbins (accessed May 7, 2015).
75. Luis Martinez, "Afghanistan Releases 65 Detainees Despite US Objections," *ABC News*, February 13, 2014, available at abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2014/02/afghanistan-releases-65-detainees-despite-us-objections/ (accessed May 7, 2015).
76. Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

ISBN: 978-1-60127-299-7

An online edition of this and related reports can be found on our website (www.usip.org), together with additional information on the subject.

Of Related Interest

- *Managing Conflict in a World Adrift* edited by Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (USIP Press, 2015)
- *Getting It Right in Afghanistan* edited by Moeed Yusuf, Scott Smith, and Colin Cookman (USIP Press, 2013)
- *Understanding Afghanistan's 2014 Presidential Election* by William A. Byrd (Special Report, April 2015)
- *Political Parties in Afghanistan* by Anna Larson (Special Report, March 2015)
- *Violence, the Taliban, and Afghanistan's 2014 Elections* by Antonio Giustozzi and Silab Mangal (Peaceworks, January 2015)



**United States
Institute of Peace**

2301 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20037

www.usip.org



@usip