

The Essence of Obama's War

The Decision-making Behind President Obama's Afghanistan Surge

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Abstract

Senator Obama campaigned on a concept of “Good War – Bad War”, which meant that he supported the Afghanistan War, but that he felt the Iraq War was a terrible mistake. When he came into office, one of his main goals was to win the war in Afghanistan. This research has assessed how and why President Obama throughout 2009 ordered a civil-military surge in Afghanistan, based primarily on interviews conducted with key individuals involved in the process. The thesis has applied Graham T. Allison’s theory on governmental behavior to assess, through rational, organizational and intrapersonal aspects, why the strategy ended up as it did.

The threat and available options that the Obama administration perceived in Afghanistan justifies the choices they made at a rational level. A question is however if the choices were made with the right assumptions. The assumptions were derived from processes and individuals from different organizations. The research shows how there was a clear footprint from the Department of Defense (DoD) and the intelligence community in the strategy’s preparatory reviews and meetings. The Department of State (DoS) was involved, but they were only a supporting actor. The DoD concentrated on an option of a large counterinsurgency campaign to defeat the threat represented by al-Qaeda and the Taliban. A team within the DoS was looking for a resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan through a political solution but did not have sufficient support from the individuals closest to President Obama.

Both rational, organizational and individual factors did shape the final decision of President Obama in 2009. External factors, like the leak of General McChrystal’s assessment on Afghanistan, or political pressure from Congress, forced Obama to make quick decisions. His network of key advisors influenced the direction leading towards the surge. During his first year in office in 2009, he increased the number of troops three times, initiated two strategic reviews, before he on December 1, 2009, announced what has later been known as the Obama Surge. The result was a significant increase in troops to Afghanistan and drone activities in Pakistan.

Acknowledgments

The topic of this thesis is important to many people. Since 2001, more than 775,000 U.S. service members have deployed at least once to Afghanistan as of 2019 (Lamothe, 2019). There have been many casualties, not only for the Afghan people but also for the U.S. and its allies. The War, which has entered its 19th year and is still ongoing, has ended, changed, and impacted many lives. One reason why this topic is important to me personally is that it has also affected the Government of Norway, and by extension, my Norwegian friends who deployed to Afghanistan. My time in the Norwegian Armed Forces and at the Norwegian Embassy in Washington D.C. has made me even more interested in how strategic decisions that influence so many nations and individuals actually come together.

This journey has been a memorable one in terms of how challenges develop one's ability to grow more knowledgeable and considerable when trying to understand a broad concept, such as the decision-making process in the U.S. However, this task would be impossible without the support I have had alongside. I am incredibly grateful to Ambassador Kåre R. Aas; this thesis would not have been possible without the support and nurturing you provided from the beginning to the end. My most profound appreciation to my husband, who has been my greatest support throughout the whole process – thank you for believing in me when I was not. Words cannot express how deeply indebted I am for my respondent's invaluable insights into a process they all were directly or indirectly part of. Thank you: Mr. Jarrett Blanc, Ambassador Douglas Lute, Ambassador Richard Olson, General David Petraeus, Mr. Bruce Riedel, Dr. Barnett Rubin, Mr. Vikram Singh, and Dr. Andrew Wilder. Despite all of them still holding important positions in the government and think-tank communities, they provided remarkable amounts of time and showed an openness, curiosity and willingness to help which by far exceeded any of my expectations. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Professor Lars Klemsdal at the University of Oslo for his constructive criticism and advice.

To my dear family, friends and colleagues at the Norwegian Embassy in D.C., who has given me helpful advice and support in this process, I am thankful for you!

The mistakes, misinterpretations, and inaccuracies in this thesis are solemnly mine to claim.

Washington, D.C., June 2020.

Sanaa Bhatti Vika

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1 INTRODUCTION

On September 11, 2001, one of the most unthinkable attacks in recent history happened. The American people and their freedom were surprisingly attacked by terrorists, attacks that killed almost 3000 foreigners and Americans in their own country (CNN, 2013). Standing in the Oval Office, President Bush addressed the nation and its allies right after the attacks, calling for a united front in the War on Terrorism (Bush, 2001). For the first time in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) history, Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty was invoked. This led to a military operation outside the typical area of responsibility for NATO. Article 5 states that an "attack against one ally is considered as an attack against all allies" (NATO, 1949). The architect behind the attacks was quickly identified as Osama bin Laden, the head of the Islamist terrorist group al-Qaeda. Together with his militants, Osama bin Laden was protected and sheltered in Afghanistan by the Taliban, who are known for their radical Islamic views. Since the Taliban refused to hand over the enemy, the U.S. retaliated by initiating a major military combat operation in October 2001 (Katzman & Thomas, 2017). In 2003, The War on Terrorism spread when the U.S. invaded Iraq to stop the alleged production of weapons of mass destruction. Now, almost two decades later, one has yet to find a conclusion to the Afghanistan War, which has become the longest war in American history (Jaffe, 2015). Today, the U.S. is engaged in bringing Afghans to the negotiation table to end the war. This thesis will show that a political settlement was also a viable option ten years ago, but that a different strategy was chosen.

Already in 2007, Senator Barack Obama shared his view that the war in Iraq was a tragically misguided war that should never have been waged (Obama, 2007). He emphasized that the U.S. should refocus its efforts on Afghanistan and Pakistan because this was the central front in the war against al-Qaeda. He believed that success in Afghanistan could be achieved by having a comprehensive strategy to defeat global terrorists (Obama, 2007). In the First Presidential Debate between Senator John McCain and Senator Obama, Obama stressed the fact that Afghanistan had deteriorated, al-Qaeda had reconstituted themselves, and that the U.S. did not have enough troops to deal with Afghanistan because of the troops being in Iraq (Obama, 2008). At the same time, Obama stated clearly that he wanted to reverse his predecessor's foreign policy choices and sought to rebalance the United States' strategy away from the firm reliance on military power over diplomacy and other aspects of American power. Despite having vowed to end the conflicts in Iraq, Obama announced after his election

that he would send more troops to Afghanistan to focus on counterinsurgency – The Obama Surge. The surge more than tripled the number of troops, leading to 100,000 U.S. troops deployed to Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan War is a seminal war that has preoccupied U.S. foreign policy significantly since 2001 (Thomas, 2019). One of the most important timeframes was the year 2009. This is the year when Obama was inaugurated, he ordered two strategic studies and three troop increases in Afghanistan. The year 2009 is key to understanding the decision-making process behind Obama’s Afghanistan strategy. Gaining a better understanding of this complex strategic decision-making will not only help us understand practical aspects of American policymaking, but may also be transferable to decision making in other organizations. New information on Afghanistan has recently been made public, and this is therefore an ideal time to look into the subject (Whitlock, 2019). This thesis seeks to understand the decision-making process behind President Obama’s 2009 increase in the number of civilian and military troops in a surge in Afghanistan. While the study of political science is often engaged with topics of national strategy, very few organizational studies have been conducted on such an important decision-making process as this. As such, this study will demystify and bring clarity into the factors that shape strategic decision making. The research question is therefore:

“How and why did President Obama in 2009 decide to increase the U.S. civil-military deployment to Afghanistan?”

The thesis will investigate what happened behind the scenes before and between the deployments made in 2009, which culminated in the final announcement into a major surge on December 1, 2009. The *how* in this question is concerned with what actual events occurred in 2009 that drove the process forward from a *problem* when Obama came to power, to a *solution* when he announced his final strategy on December 1, 2009. The *why* in the question seeks to understand the underlying factors that contributed to why the process and decisions ended up like they did. The thesis will only focus on the senior leadership of the most relevant parts of the U.S. executive branch, such as the Department of State (DoS), the Department of Defense (DoD) and the National Security Council (NSC). The decision-making process in question includes the NSC meetings, official strategic reviews, and the interagency processes that happened continuously, including the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) commanders’ involvement. The primary sources for analyzing the topic are interviews with individuals who were in central positions

within the Obama Administration and worked closely with President Obama, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of State. The thesis will employ the conceptual tools and analytical framework of *Essence of Decision* developed by Graham T. Allison (1999) to look at the problem from different angles. Doing so will show how rational, organizational, and interpersonal factors influenced the process, the decisions, and eventually, the grand strategy for Afghanistan.

1.1 Limitations to the Thesis

Strategic governmental decision-making is intrinsically complex. This thesis will henceforth not comprise all parties involved, or all factors influencing the decision-making process leading up to the surge. The scope is limited to extracting key parts of the process in order to gain a better understanding of the decisions at this point in history.

First, the thesis is limited in time as it only focuses on the decisions made to increase the civil-military footprint in Afghanistan in 2009. The history before Obama became president will be used for context only. Similarly, the thesis will not evaluate the implementation of the final order of the surge and the withdrawal of the troops after 2009. Although we have the benefit of hindsight, the thesis will not attempt to predict, evaluate, or recommend outcomes.

Second, there was both a military and civilian component to the surge. The civilian part of the surge was led by the DoS, and the U.S Embassy in Kabul had an important role in meeting the civilian staffing targets for it. The thesis will not explain the civilian aspect of the actual surge in-depth, with the recognition that both the military and civilian elements were important to the strategy.

Third, the legislative and judiciary branches of the U.S. will not be discussed. And although the U.S. decision-making process also affected the U.S. allies in NATO and the Afghan Government, the influence or participation of these will not be evaluated.

1.2 Thesis Structure

Chapter one provides a brief conceptualization of the topic and the objectives of the study, with a presentation of the research question.

Chapter two presents the theoretical framework of the thesis, which is based on *The Essence of Decision* by Graham T. Allison & Philip Zelikow (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). This framework will help us understand how and why President Obama decided to increase the civil-military deployment to Afghanistan. Definitions, terms, and models will be presented in this chapter before they are applied in the study.

Chapter three will address the methodology and methods used for the process of providing an answer to the research question. Additionally, a methodological discussion is included, addressing the validity and reliability of the research process, adjoined with ethical considerations.

Chapter four lays out a description of what happened in the decision-making process, based on findings collected from both personal interviews and a literature review. The chapter is chronologically structured in four phases critical to the decision-making processes: *Campaign and Elections*, *The First Surge*, *The Second Announcement*, and *The Final Order*.

Chapter five analyzes the findings using Allison's conceptual models and will answer why Obama's strategy became what it was.

Chapter six concludes the thesis.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Graham Allison's model in 1969 was presented in an article titled "*Conceptual Models of Foreign Policy and the Cuban Missile Crisis*." He further expanded that model to become *The Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* in 1971. Allison used the Cuban Missile Crisis as a case study to illuminate three different conceptual models that explain international and governmental behavior (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). Allison's work had a great impact on understanding governmental behavior and created multiple ways of understanding the governmental decision-making process (Marsh, 2014). The conceptual models provide three different perspectives that can be used to understand and analyze foreign policy decision-making processes, and may, therefore, be used to investigate President Obama's decision. As the decision-making processes behind both the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Afghanistan surge of 2009 are both strategic and involve the U.S. president and his closest advisors, and other government agencies, this theory is considered to be suitable for this thesis' case.

The three conceptual models are based on different sets of assumptions. They can be used to analyze a state's behavior and the gap between the intention of the actors and the result of government actions.

The models are constructed as analytical paradigms. A paradigm is a "*systematic statement of the basic assumptions, concepts and propositions employed by a school of analysis,*" according to Robert K. Merton (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 23). Depending on a school of thought or a school of analysis, a paradigm presents a set of beliefs and conceptions in relation to each other and then group these components into one model. The main components of Allison's conceptual models include *basic unit of analysis*, *the organizing concepts*, *the dominant inference pattern*, and several *propositions* suggested by the paradigm. These will all be explained for each model in the succeeding sub-chapters. These components are all included in the three different conceptual models as a guideline for the analyst in search of an explanation (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

Both Allison (1969 & 1971) and Allison & Zelikow (1999) will be applied in this study. This thesis will use the strengths of the three models to perceive and analyze the complex decision-making process of the Obama Administration. Allison's conceptual models offer different tools to perceive what needs to be explained. In order to understand the complexity of the

decision to increase troops in Afghanistan, the thesis will use all conceptual models to search for different explanations of what really happened. These models provide an opportunity to examine a broad issue with a wide set of analytical options. This enables capturing the complexity behind President Obama’s decision rather than restricting the collection and analysis of data by one narrow theory. Since the case being studied is quite broad and the researcher has a limited prior understanding of the case being studied, these models will help explore the various sides of the decision that was made.

The figure below gives a summary of Allison’s organizational politics and its intentions.

	LOGIC	DECISION LOCUS	AS
MODEL I	Rational	Organization	Choice
MODEL II	Routine	Division	Output
MODEL III	Bargaining	Individual	Results (Outcome)

Figure 1: Summary of models (Cade, n.d.)

2.1 Model I Rational Actor Model.

One of the most common portrayals of decision-making is one that explains action as rational choice (March, 1994). Theories of rational choice are used to understand and communicate choices, and many have used rationality to describe actions that have desirable outcomes. March defined rationality as “...a particular and very familiar class of procedures for making choices” (March, 1994, p. 2). By doing so, March narrowed and sharpened the definition by linking it to the processes of choice. A rational procedure may lead to various outcomes, which may or may not lead the decision-maker to the desired good outcome (March, 1994, p. 2). This means that rational decisions that are made cannot guarantee the best objective outcome ahead of time because the result can be something other than intended. March’s definition of rationality lays the groundwork for understanding the principles of Graham Allison’s conceptual model.

Allison’s Rational Actor Model describes foreign policy decisions as to the consequence of unitary states conducting an objective value-maximizing analysis of choice. Model I predicts that the government is a unitary decision-maker, identifies problems and takes action according to the most value-maximizing choice (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). In Model I the decision-maker makes *choices* among a series of alternatives. In this case, President Obama is the unitary decision-maker representing his government.

The *Basic Unit of Analysis*, according to this model, is *Governmental Action as Choice*. The fundamental view of this model is that activities in foreign affairs are understood as actions chosen by the nation or a government. The government selects the action that will maximize its strategic goal and objectives (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 24). Each action of the decision-maker is part of a strategic objective according to a plan. The events that occur are the result of a nation or government's choice to conduct action or multiple actions.

The models’ *Organizing Concepts* view the government as a rational, unitary decision-maker, which is the agent who chooses action as a response to the situation the actor faces. Action is conceived as a rational choice, which moves the nation to act in regard to threats and opportunities arising in the international strategic arena. The actor has the option of selecting between several courses of action. These will have a series of consequences that will constitute benefits and costs with regard to the strategic goals and objectives. Each choice is

rational and value-maximizing in terms of the government's goals and objectives (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 24).

The models' *Dominant Inference Pattern* is if a government performed a particular action, that action selected is most likely to be the most value-maximizing in terms of the actor's objectives. To find Model I explanatory power, one must find the main purpose of what the action serves.

The *General Propositions* of the rational actor model stems from any particular action that is taken is the result of a combination of a state's values and objectives, how they perceive the alternative of action, the estimated consequences from each alternative, and the net value of each set of consequences. This will either *increase* or *reduce* the likelihood of that action being chosen.

Model I links purpose and action (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 49). The decision-maker chooses the alternative that best advances his interests. Model I's required outputs are measured by *acts* and *choices* and the actor chooses the alternative that best advances his interest. For this particular case, the research has to identify the possible choices that the Obama administration faced by analyzing their actions and options based on their account of the situation.

Model I, also known as the Rational Actor Model, stems from the classic rational choice theory. It undertakes the national government as a unitary actor, meaning that the national government is a single rational solitary actor and a rational decision-maker (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). It assumes that each action is part of a strategic objective according to a plan. In this case, the thesis will try to identify the rational choices President Obama and his administration were facing. That will be based on the perceived choices the president and his administration felt they had.

To summarize this model, one can point out that action is chosen in response to a problem to fix an issue, and the solution is chosen from various sets of options and the action based on the rational choice.

2.2 Model II Organizational Behavior Model

Model II places its significance on the role and influence of organizational logic and mission as well as standard operating procedures in foreign policymaking. Allison summarizes the governmental behavior as “action chosen by a unitary, rational decision-maker: centrally controlled, completely informed, and value-maximizing” (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 143). Governments define alternatives and estimate consequences as organizations process information. Government behavior can, according to Model II can be understood less as deliberate *choices* of leaders, and more as *outputs* of organizations functioning according to a standard sequence of behavior (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 143). When performing complex tasks in an organization, the behavior of large numbers of individuals must be coordinated. Coordination requires standard operating procedures and rules according to how operations are executed (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 143). The behavior of these organizations or governments which are relevant to an issue is determined by the already established routines before an instance (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 144). Model II attempts to understand the problems of foreign affairs in different terms than explanations by Model I. This thesis analysis of Model II will try to identify the relevant organizational behavior of the Obama Administration from which the action emerged.

The *Basic unit of analysis* for this model is *Policy as Organizational Output*. An *output* of organizational processes, or the way things are done by routines and standard operating procedures, shapes the outcome of the decision. The happenings in international affairs are organizational processes, where the actual occurrences are the organizational outputs. For example; the surge in Afghanistan led the U.S troops to deploy to different areas of Afghanistan, which initiated organizational actions: actions of soldiers in platoons, which form companies that turn into battalions, brigades and divisions where the different soldiers acted according to fixed routines of the U.S armed forces. The government leaders make decisions that trigger an organization like the U.S armed forces to deploy. However, the way they deploy will happen according to the standard operating procedures of the organization. That is the nature of an organization, and the organizational behavior is determined by previously established procedures and routines. Fixed structures and routines existing in different organizations are not always perceived by the leaders. Nevertheless, in any case, it is critical for an understanding of what is actually done.

The models' *Organizing Concepts* view the *Organizational Actors* as a constellation of loosely allied organizations on top of which government leaders sit and act only when component organizations perform routines. In the U.S. government, this can be departments or agencies like the DoS or the U.S. Air Force.

The models' *Dominant Inference Pattern* is viewed as the characteristics of a government's action that follows the already established routines from the choice made by government leaders. Organizations act based on information and estimates provided by existing routines or established programs within the organizations (Allison & Zelikow, p. 175).

The *General proposition* for Model II is that *existing organized capabilities influence government choice*. This points out that organizations tend to choose actions along the lines of their capabilities, e.g., as in hammering (and treating problems as nails) where the hammer represents the main tool and competency in the organization. The reason is that the capability is already available, and the cost and effort of creating it have already been paid. It is easier to choose something already established rather than building it from the ground since the output will be chosen by the leadership of that government or organization.

Examination of government action in terms of Model II can be fruitful, but in order to get a strong grip about the case study, it is important to understand the characteristics of the organizations involved (Allison & Zelikow, p. 185). In this thesis, it will be important to understand how the White House, more specifically the NSC, DoD, and DoS are different from each other and how they generate policy recommendations. Many of the mentioned agencies have their own standard operating procedures and objectives.

Model II, the Organizational Behavior Model, places its emphasis on the organizational processes and the role and influence a semi-feudal organization and standard operating procedures add up to a range of available options (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). A central assumption of the model is that the loosely allied organizations have their own interests and own way of doing things, meaning the government actions are merely outputs of an organizational routine. How the interagency process led by the White House had an impact on the decision will be examined through this model's capacity. The state is viewed as a unitary actor, but all the different agencies involved affected the president's evaluation and decision.

This model can be summarized as governmental decisions are not rational choices but organizational outputs that are partially coordinated by the government. Organizations have their own procedures on how to deal with issues based on already established routines.

2.3 Model III Governmental Politics Model

The third and the last model is the Governmental Politics Model. This model's roots can be traced to the field of public administration and the early studies of foreign policy decision-making, and the role of domestic politics in public policymaking. Contrary to Model I, where a single unitary actor is the decision-maker and makes choices among a series of alternatives while representing its government, Model III looks at the bargaining process between multiple players with various interests and goals. The top leaders of an organization, each in its own right, are players in a central, competitive game (Allison, 1969, p. 707). The influence of the multiple players, the differences in relative power, and the bargaining between them, leads to the *outcome* of the decision.

The *Basic Unit of Analysis* for this model is *Governmental Action as Political Resultant*. According to this model, happenings in foreign affairs are neither *choices* nor *outputs*. Instead, they can be understood as *outcomes* of various bargaining games along players arranged hierarchically in the national government (Allison, 1969, p. 707). Allison described the nature of the competitive game as following:

The decisions and actions of governments are essentially intranational political outcomes: outcomes in the sense that what happens is not chosen as a solution to a problem but rather results from compromise, coalition, competition, and confusion among government officials who see different faces of an issue; political in the sense that the activity from which the outcomes emerge is best characterized as bargaining. (Allison, 1969, p. 708)

Therefore, political competition is crucial to bureaucratic politics, and it also describes how the decisions are the product of politics (Allison, 1971). The primary source for this paradigm is based on the result of political bargaining among key actors. The decisions and actions of a government are, in a sense, not chosen as a solution but rather a result of compromise, conflict, and confusion of actors with different interests and unequal influence (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 258). Allison also argues that when actors get together to take action, the

result will often be different from what they intended it to be before they started interacting as a group (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 258). The reason is the number of individuals involved in a decision where all have different positions, interests, and ambitions regarding the decision.

The *Organizing Concept* of this paradigm focuses on who plays, what factors shape the actor's perception, preferences, and their stands on the issue. The government actor is neither a unitary actor nor a conglomerate of organizations as viewed by the previously discussed models but rather a number of individual players (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 296). Since each holds a specific position in the government, she or he is occupying a position where they all are taking part in the policy developments. Their position defines what they may and must do. For example, in the U.S. government, it includes players such as the president, the Secretaries, the Director's Chairmen, and Advisors. Their advantage or disadvantage in the play stems from the position they hold (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 297). In our case, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was the most senior personal advisor to the president on political and military issues of foreign policy.

The models' *Dominant Inference Pattern* is if a nation performed an action, that action is an *output* of all the different negotiations within the government. Model III's explanatory power lies in understanding the individuals, their positions and preferences, and the interaction between them (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

The *General Propositions* require information about the rule of the game, what characteristics each participant have, and who has the most influential cards around the negotiating table to maximize their own winning. In most of the cases, the players are representing their agency, and the beliefs of the agencies reflect their leaders representing it at the negotiation table. The actors can be expected to favor options that complement their role and different opinions to increase their influence in the decision-making process. Their policy positions are mainly but not exclusively determined by their role and position (Jones 2010). Allison describes how government decisions are a product of politics and "pulling and hauling" between actors (Marsh, 2014).

The positions of the actors in the political decision-making process will be influenced by means such as coalition building, exchanging favors, bargaining and compromise (Jones, 2008, p. 286). This paradigm tries to illustrate the complexity of bureaucratic politics by

identifying a number of relevant factors to explain how actors behave during negotiations in a decision-making process.

This model can be summarized by explaining an individual's unique perspective influences the decision-making process. The decision favors the policy options that fulfill the actor's bureaucratic role to increase their influence and power in the decision-making process. The outcome or result will evolve from the different negotiations within the alliance.

2.4 Summary of the Conceptual Models

The power of each of the conceptual models can be summarized as illustrated in the figure below. This is collected from Allison and condensed and modified to fit this thesis.

PARADIGMS ADJUSTED TO THE CASE			
THE PARADIGM	MODEL I RATIONAL ACTOR MODEL	MODEL II ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR MODEL	MODEL III GOVERNMENTAL POLITICS MODEL
MAIN PURPOSE OF THE MODEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Finding the purpose the action serves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Uncover the special capacities, repertoires, and org. routines that produce outputs which led to the occurrence <input type="checkbox"/> Understand if important issues fall exclusively under the domain of a single organization <input type="checkbox"/> Flesh out information about the organizations involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Explain the result of the bargaining game <input type="checkbox"/> Focus on the many actors in the process
BASIC UNIT OF ANALYSIS	Governmental action as <i>choice</i>	Governmental action as <i>organizational output</i>	Governmental action as <i>policy resultant</i> (outcome)
KEY QUESTIONS (ALLISON)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What are the objectives (or perceived) circumstances that the state conceives as threats and opportunities? <input type="checkbox"/> What are the state's goals? <input type="checkbox"/> What are the objective (or perceived) options for addressing this issue? <input type="checkbox"/> What are the objective (or perceived) strategic costs and benefits of each option? <input type="checkbox"/> What is the state's best choice given these conditions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Of what organizations does the government consist? <input type="checkbox"/> What capabilities and constrains do these organizations' existing SOPs create in producing information about international conditions, threats and opportunities? <input type="checkbox"/> What capabilities and constrains do these organizations' existing SOPs create in generating the menu of options for action? <input type="checkbox"/> What capabilities and constrains do these organizations' existing SOPs establish for implementing whatever is chosen? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Whose views and values count in shaping the choice and action? <input type="checkbox"/> What factor shapes each player's; perceptions, preferred course of action, and the players stand on the action? <input type="checkbox"/> What factors account for each players impact on the choice and action? <input type="checkbox"/> What is the "action channel" that is, the established process for aggregating competing perceptions, preferences, and stands of players in making decision and taking action?
KEY QUESTIONS (CASE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What was the strategic environment of the USA in 2009? <input type="checkbox"/> What were the state's values and objectives? <input type="checkbox"/> What was the objective reasoning behind sending more troops to Afghanistan? <input type="checkbox"/> What was considered the value-maximizing option for the US – and why? <input type="checkbox"/> What options did Obama have? <input type="checkbox"/> What were the estimated costs for the different options? <input type="checkbox"/> What were the estimated consequences (follow from each alternative) and net valuation of each set of consequences? <input type="checkbox"/> The rhetoric changed from <i>defeating</i> al Qaeda to <i>disrupt, dismantle and defeat</i> al Qaeda. Who and what was the threat? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What were the main organizations involved in the decision? <input type="checkbox"/> Who were the involved organizations in the different sub-strategies (COIN, Strategic review of AF-PAK Strategy, McChrystal assessment, final review) leading towards the final order? <input type="checkbox"/> What were the actual occurrences in the overall organizational process? <input type="checkbox"/> What are the characteristics of the involved organizations? <input type="checkbox"/> What did the different organizations do internally? <input type="checkbox"/> What could the organizations do, or not do, or disposed to do without superior direction? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Who were the main individuals in the process? <input type="checkbox"/> Were all the actors of equal positions? If not, what were the differences? <input type="checkbox"/> Who were advocates and opponents to the surge? <input type="checkbox"/> What were the different alliances within the NSC? <input type="checkbox"/> How did the group process affects choices and action? <input type="checkbox"/> Was there a tug of war between powerful officials? <input type="checkbox"/> Who influenced the President's decision the most? <input type="checkbox"/> Who formulated the final orders? <input type="checkbox"/> How did each player value the payoff / how did they maximize their winning?

Figure 2: Paradigms adjusted to case (inspired by Allison & Zelikow, 1999)

2.5 Critique of Allison's Conceptual Models

Allison's approach has been widely used by students and scholars and have had a large impact on the study of bureaucracy. Allison's conceptual models have been useful for students of foreign affairs, public policy, social science and even the field of economics. After many decades this theory is still relevant and used. The theory can be viewed as a "one size fits all" theory because of its wide usage, although the theory can hardly be seen as perfect for all the categories, subjects and fields it has actually been used on. Allison's approach has also inspired a myriad of criticism from various scholars on the different elements of the theoretical framework. Allison's three models are often seen as clusters of assumptions and categories that can drive the analyst away from the primary purpose of its usage; to explain what occurred rather than describe, predict or recommend an outcome.

Some scholars argue that Model I is over-simplified from a decision-rhetoric perspective. They believe the model should have been enhanced by reflecting the complexities of real decision-makers and the choices they confront (Bendor & Hammond, 1992, p. 305). Other authors claim that the assumptions and categories of Model I neglect the organizational processes and bureaucratic politics and making the model inadequate (Lewis, 2009, p. 118). Model II is considered one of the most influential sections because of all the derived insights in organizational theory that have been applied to the model (Bendor & Hammond, 1992, p. 309). Nonetheless, some critique Model II for being too simplified. Model II suggests that predictable behavior is generated by simple rules. This assumption risks over-simplifying the natural complexity of individual decision-making (Bendor & Hammond, 1992). Model III is the least precisely formulated model and is also very complex because it incorporates many variables. Its fundamental assumptions are less clear than those of Model I & II, since Model III is not able to explain one case very well because it incorporates too many variables to be analyzed. (Bendor & Hammond, 1992, p. 318). Most of the critique of Allison's has been directed towards Model III, and scholars such as Jerel A. Rosati highlight that the foundation of the model has been deleted in the revised version. Rosati states that the discussions in the 2nd edition are vague, "without connecting its relevance to the dynamics of governmental politics" (Rosati, 2001). Krasner (1972) argued Model III could not be a determinant of political action in view of the fact that the president sets the rules of the game and selects the players.

Allison's three paradigms provide a theoretical structure for a better-organized analysis of foreign policymaking and government behavior (Bernstein, 2000, p. 138). Since the models are not mutually exclusive, it gives the researcher the possibility to combine particular elements of the models (Rourke, 1972, p. 431). At the same time, the models do not provide any tools to determine the relative explanatory power between them. Being aware of the limitations of the theory makes it easier to steer away from the models' weaknesses. Each researcher will have a unique perspective and find different flaws or shortcomings in the model. The interpretation and usage of the models demand in-depth information, which is not always easy to obtain. On the contrary, this is where we find the models' strength, because the models are trying capture a bigger picture. It is the responsibility of the researcher to paint a picture that leads to different judgments about what is important and relevant. If the researcher uses only one of Allison's model, he or she loses the model's ability to understand the dynamics of governmental politics of the case being studied. The same research question will lead to variances between the answers generated by the three models, as Allison states:

But as we observe the models at work, what is equally striking are the differences in the ways the analysts conceive of the problem, shape the puzzle, unpack the summary questions, and pick up pieces of the world in search of an answer. (Allison, 1971, p. 249)

This sub-chapter has pointed out challenges to consider throughout the use of Allison's models.

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter will present the methodological framework of the thesis. One of the most important characteristics of empirical research is to be systemic, thorough, and transparent (Tjora, 2017). How data is collected, obtained, and analyzed is a crucial part of every research process, as the chosen research method will influence the results and contribute to increasing the value, validity, and reliability of the analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodology and the primary methods applied to best answer the thesis' research question. The chapter will elaborate on the methodical process behind the data collection, and data analysis.

3.1 Data Collection

The research employs a method of triangulation both for collecting and analyzing data. This method enables viewing the research problem through different perspectives to reduce the risk of missing important aspects. The method reduces the inadequacy and bias produced by just one method of inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is important to achieve an objective understanding of the social and organizational interaction between multiple players. The objective of this method is to identify, explore, and understand different dimensions of the case to enrich interpretations of the Obama administration's decision-making process regarding Afghanistan.

When doing qualitative research, the credibility of the research findings may increase when evidence is collected from various data sources (Given, 2008, p. 893). The thesis is based on data that is collected from sources such as biographies, official statements, and records, investigating newspaper articles, official reports, and personal interviews. Each type of collected data provides different insights into President Obama's decision-making process. The strategy of using triangulation as a method of collecting data requires an increased amount of time to collect and then analyze it. But at the same time, the increased amount of effort enables a deeper understanding of the case (Given, 2008, p. 894). The limited scope of the thesis unfortunately makes it hard to dive deep into all the details. Even so, the method of triangulation renders a richer impression of the case and contributes to verifying and validating the integrity of the findings.

3.1.1 Document Analysis

The idea behind a document analysis is to use a systematic approach to analyze documentary evidence to answer specific research questions (Gross, 2018, p. 2). Document analysis can either be done as a stand-alone study or as an element of a substantial qualitative or mixed methods study. This research is doing the latter. The document analysis was conducted in two separate phases. The first phase was used to get an overall understanding of the case, which enabled formulating a research scope and question. Bob Woodward's, *Obama's Wars* (2010) provided an excellent overview of the case, as it tells a story about the war in Afghanistan under President Obama. *The Afghan Papers* (2019) contains more than two thousand pages of interviews and memos about the war in Afghanistan and inspired developing the research question. The second phase was a more narrowed search for pertinent information that could confirm or challenge information gathered from personal interviews. Key literature here was biographies, such as Gates (2014), Clinton (2014), McChrystal (2013) and a biography on Holbrooke by Packer (2019). Barfield (2010) and Coll (2018) provided contextual information useful for understanding the U.S. relationship with and between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

These secondary sources provide an understanding of the subject that helps choose what aspects of the case are in and out of scope for the thesis. Although there is a lot of data available on many of the facets of the Afghanistan War, they have been collected for different purposes. Most of them have had the perspective of political science, while this study has a organizational behavior focus. Separate interviews were therefore required to get the necessary information to answer the research question. The understanding gathered from literature could be used together with Allison's conceptual models to produce a theoretical matrix (see figure 2) specifically for this case. The matrix enabled both the creation of an interview guide and to structure and analyze data. Personal interviews with primary sources that were part of the actual decision-making process could then be used to collect unique information useful for answering the research question.

3.1.2 Elite Interviews

An in-depth interview allows the source to go into detail on specific questions of interest. In-depth interviews give the researcher the opportunity to study opinions, attitudes, and experiences of the source and to take part in their worldview (Tjora, 2017). Since the

document analysis had already provided an overview of the case, conducting in-depth interviews were appropriate to provide a deeper understanding. A narrative interview would allow the respondents to tell their own stories using their own words. This option was not selected because of its unstructured nature that would preclude focusing on the specific areas of interest. An in-depth semi-structured approach provided the best compromise between real-time reflection and answers to specific questions. A guide is required for a productive interview, and the interview guide for this research was based on figure 2, which in turn was a combination of the theory and document analysis. The semi-structured nature of the interview provided the freedom to discuss the most appropriate topics for the case, created an opportunity for follow-up questions to the participants, and allocated more time to the most pertinent questions.

The interview sources were selected with the method of triangulation in mind. The research would be strengthened if the interviewed individuals had different roles in the process. Based on the document review, a group of four persons were identified as people that would possibly bring good value to the research. However, gaining access to these sources is difficult as they had or still have important, senior positions within the U.S. Government. A significant risk for this research would, therefore, be the ability to connect with the right sources. The Norwegian Ambassador to the USA was very helpful in this regard, as he helped reach out to these persons that, in other circumstances, would be difficult to contact. After each interview, the snowball sampling method was used to recruit new sources by recommendation. The disadvantage of using the snowball method is that it is difficult to determine beforehand how relevant or unbiased the suggested respondents are. This gives the researcher less control over the sampling method. On the other hand, after completing the interview, the respondents had a better idea of what information this research needed, and they could, therefore, help find sources that were of an even better fit. This process enabled getting closer and closer to the key persons in the decision-making process. The following persons were interviewed:

LIST OF INTERVIEWS	
Name	Date
Mr. Jarrett Blanc	April, 14, 2020
Mr. Bruce Riedel	April, 20, 2020
Dr. Barnett Rubin	April, 23, 2020
Mr. Vikram Singh	April, 24, 2020
Gen. David Petraeus	Multiple emails, from April 29 to June 6, 2020
Dr. Andrew Wilder	April, 30, 2020
Amb. Douglas Lute	May, 1, 2020
Amb. Richard Olson	May, 5, 2020

Figure 3: List of interviews

Interestingly enough, all the sources are men, as are most writers on the subject. Some of the respondents worked within the Obama administration, and some are experts in U.S. foreign policy or Afghanistan. A short biography on each is provided in Appendix 1. Below is a figure that shows the key players and the relationship the sources had to the process. Dr. Wilder and Ambassador Olson were not active parts in the decision process.

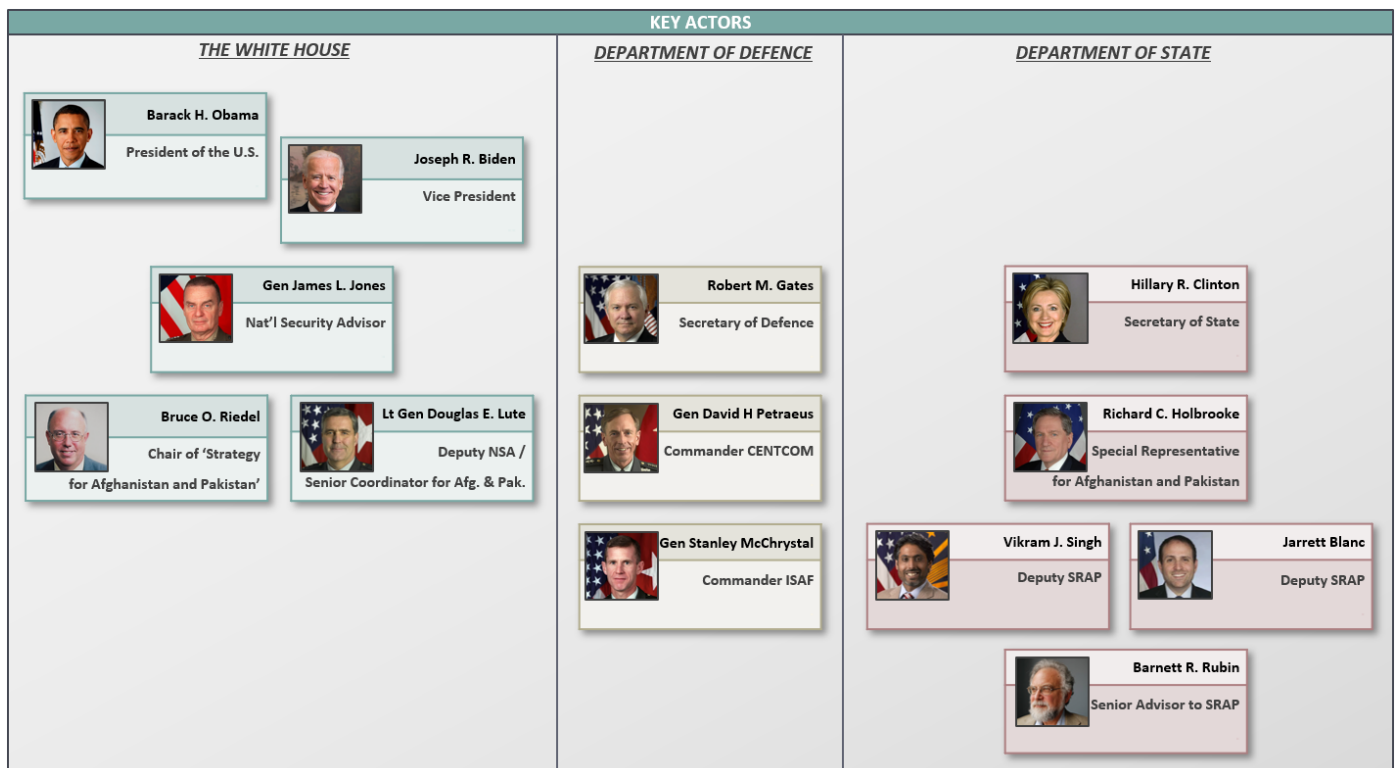


Figure 4: Key Actors in the decision process

A person who is selected by name or position for a particular reason, rather than being randomly or anonymously chosen, is characterized as an elite (Hochschild, 2009). This is

independent of their social, economic, or political standing. To accomplish a balanced analysis, research of books and reports are necessary and valuable to add a perspective and information before conducting elite interviews. The interviewer must know as much as possible about the context, stance, and past behavior of the interview subject when conducting an interview (Hochschild, 2009). Reasonably, one does not want to waste the respondent's time, and one wants to get as complete, honest, and nuanced a story as possible from the respondent because it gives the respondent more material with which to effectively develop their own explanation of past behavior (Hochschild, 2009). In this way, the interviewer enables probing deeply into the respondent's perhaps idiosyncratic or nonrational stances. Thorough preparation for each person was therefore required ahead of the interviews. Information on each respondent was collected from the document review where many are mentioned, online searches, and from other people that have worked with them. The extensive literature study enabled adjusting the interview to each respondent rather than asking generalized questions. In this way, the respondents could drive the discussion in interesting ways that would uncover new details on the case.

3.1.3 Limitations

Interviewing elites are challenging in many ways. Identifying the right persons to interview, getting in contact, and convincing them that they should set aside time on their busy schedules for an interview, require some work. Some of the respondents had high expectations for the interview. Almost all expected that Woodward's *Obama's War* was read prior. One respondent suggested reading three books before scheduling the interview. However, when the actual interviews were under way, all respondents were very willing to discuss the matter openly, providing excellent insight into the case.

The people interviewed in this thesis are for the most part not made anonymous based on the positions they have. The risk with this is that the respondents may answer more cautiously, politically correct, or only disclose information that is already publicly available. The advantage is that the information can benefit future research. All of the respondents agreed on being mentioned by name, although some wanted to approve the quotes before, they were used. On particular sensitive topics, data from interviews are included without being addressed to specific respondents. This has the benefit of adding depth to the analysis, at the cost of making the data harder to trace for future research.

Everyone that was interviewed clearly had an opinion on the research subject. This was helpful as they were very motivated to provide information. The researcher must be cognizant that these opinions may be influenced by many things; their positions at the time, their responsibilities, the parts of the problem they saw, or hindsight. They may be inclined to shine a more positive light on the aspects they were a part of. A crucial limiting factor of the interviews is that none of the respondents were the principal decision-makers. It is unfortunate that the research question asks about one man's decision when that person is not able to correct the misconceptions or information others are providing about him. It would, however, be unrealistic to expect the former U.S. President or his most senior advisors such as Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, or the Vice President to be available for an interview in support of a master thesis. However, the people interviewed were possibly even more involved in the process than the senior decision makers, because of their participation both in the staffing for and the conduct of meetings in the National Security Council and various review bodies.

Because of the COVID-19 situation, the interviews had to be conducted primarily using Skype. Conducting interviews over Skype creates a barrier between the researcher and the interviewee. It is more difficult to see body language and facial expressions, and bandwidth problems sometimes make it difficult to hear the other person. There was a language barrier, as English is not the researcher's primary language, and typical jargons used in Washington D.C. could be challenging to pick up on. There is also a cultural difference between Norwegians and Americans, and the way questions were asked could, therefore, be understood differently from how they were intended. Likewise, the way the data is interpreted and analyzed could be different from how it was intended. The method of triangulation should help mitigate the effects of communication barriers.

3.2 Data Analysis

3.2.1 Coding

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, further reducing it into themes throughout a process of coding, and concentrating the codes to be presented in the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 183). If there is a lot of empirical data on the subject, the coding process is imperative for structuring the data into something useful for the research question. Coding the empirical data helps conceptualizing the larger picture. Of course, reducing the data into a manageable mass relevant for the research does (by definition) remove data. It is, therefore, of importance to structure this process in a way that provides the most reliable and precise output.

The software *f4transkript* was used to transcribe each recorded interview. The program helped accurately transcribe the interview in the respondents' own jargon. When at the stage of transcription, one does not know what quotes will be included or excluded from the analysis. It was, therefore, important to be as precise and accurate as possible. The process of structuring the data began during data collection. In this way, data could be channeled from the outset into Allison's three models. Some data naturally fit within several models. Initially, a broad scope was used when collecting and coding the data, but the data was reduced throughout the process. This was a measure to ensure relevant information was not discarded to begin with. After the data was collected, the software *f4analyse* was used to perform the coding.

A systematic conceptual and analytical discipline developed by Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton was employed to structure the data collection (Gioia et al., 2012). Their method, which is divided into a first, second and third-order of analysis, helped classify and label the information. The codes were organized based on the topic and similarity of the respondents' answers. The first round of coding, adhering to Gioia's 1st-order analysis, was based on the participants' own terms and resulted in many categories. There were, however, similarities in the categories, and these similarities could be used to condense the number of categories into a manageable number. This was the foundation for the 2nd-order analysis, which was based upon the theoretical elements of Allison's conceptual models. The 3rd-order analysis was simply Allison's three conceptual models. A 4th order analysis (in reality, an alternative third

order analysis) was created by allocating the gathered data to chronological time periods. The codes were therefore based both on a contextual and a theoretical dimension. The contextual dimension helped frame the topic discussed to a particular phase in the decision-making process. The theoretical dimension helped to analyze the information in conjunction with Allison's theoretical tools. Through the filtering power of f4analyse, it was possible to analyze multiple combinations of data in line with the thesis' strategy of triangulation. The codes applied to the collected data are presented in figure 5 below.

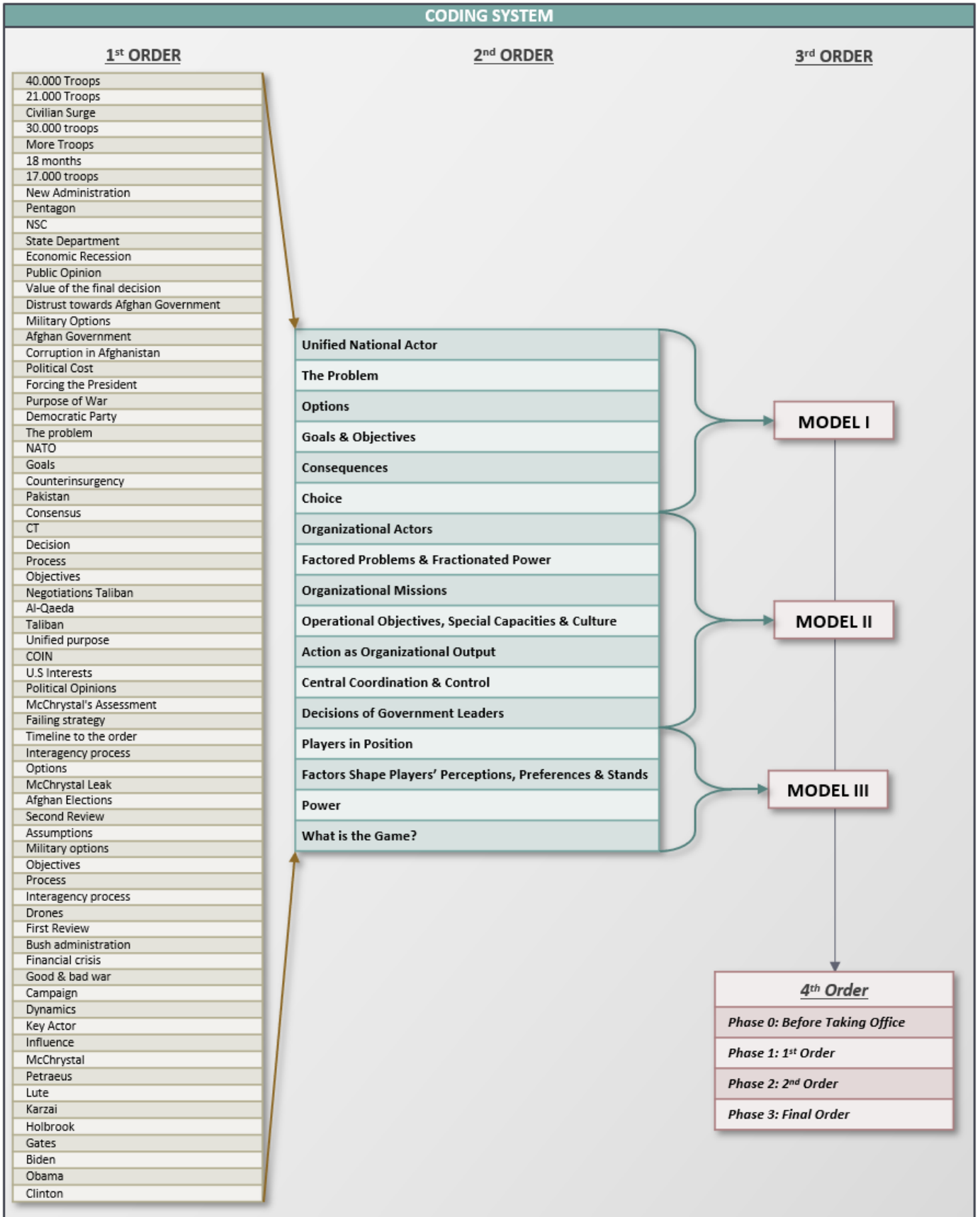


Figure 5: Structuring of Data from Interview Transcripts (Inspired by Gioia et al., 2012)

3.2.2 Analysis

Analyzing the data was done by first creating a chronological story of what happened. The presentation of this will follow in Chapter 4. *What happened* can be an ambiguous question. There were the official decisions that were made, there were the deliberations and analysis before them, and there were the interests and opinions of each individual. All of this *happened*; however, for the initial part of the analysis, this thesis will focus on the major, official, and explicit events. Based on the uncovered information, the analysis can then be grouped into several sub-parts that each focused on a certain phase of Obama's decision-making process. By doing so, the data is divided into parts that could be more easily analyzed. The phases each included decisions and major milestones relevant to the Afghanistan strategy. The phases that will be analyzed are *Campaign and Elections*, *The First Surge*, *The Second Announcement*, and *The Final Order*

For the second part of the analysis, each phase will be viewed from the perspective of the three different conceptual models. An emphasis is put on data that is confirmed from multiple sources. This method enables a distinction between the explicit elements of the story from the underlying, more explanatory details that preceded and may have caused it. The data from the document analysis, the information provided by the respondents, and in fact also the relationship that was sensed between the respondents have been used to uncover the layer behind the explicit story.

The drawback of this method is that empirical data is pushed into conceptual models that may not be right for the situation. A lot of the analysis is based on the way the respondents answered the questions. One has to be cognizant that it is difficult to find the *right answer* using this method. What could be done, however, is to uncover and explain some of the factors that in turn influenced the decision making. However, as there may be many more factors, and as President Obama has not yet shared his reasoning, we are left to theorize which criteria played the largest role in his decision making.

3.3 Ethics, Validity and Reliability

3.3.1 Ethics

As interviews have been conducted in this research, it is very important to consider the ethical principles caused by the asymmetrical relationship between the source and researcher. (Tjora, 2017, p. 48). Ethical considerations are important for the data analysis and its representation as participants need prevention from harmful identification and disclosure of comprehensive findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 183). A way of doing so is to cover names or to present multiple perspectives reflecting the complex picture. Most of the respondents in this research are identifiable by their name, role, and direct quotes, to which they all have provided their consent. In this research, the sources are not made anonymous because of their senior positions and responsibilities in the process. It is however important to protect the sources from causing harm to themselves. Many of those interviewed for this study are still active in senior positions in Washington, D.C., and it is not the intention of the thesis to cause any problems for them in the future. This was achieved by carefully including in this thesis only pertinent information from the interviews, affording the subjects the opportunity to read and remove any quotes that were planned for use, and to make certain sensitive data anonymous.

As strategic decision making is difficult, it is not the intent to use this thesis as a platform to criticize the decisions made by President Obama or his advisors. The idea behind this thesis was rather to understand more of the complexity that underlies such important, life-changing, and formative decisions as the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan. By presenting and discussing the data in rational and a non-judgmental way, there is a chance that the people being interviewed will be open to future interviews to help us better understand the process. Abusing their trust would be harmful to both this research project and future ones.

A requirement by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is that research gets notified. Before conducting research, it is necessary to request approval from an institutional review board for the research. The Norwegian Center of Research Data (NSD) has approved this research. The approval is attached in Appendix 4. A consent form provided the participants with information about the project and its purpose and gave the respondents the option to either be an identifiable source or be strictly anonymous. This was sent, received and agreed on by email prior to the interviews.

3.3.1 Validity and Reliability

Validity is an evaluation of how truthful and accurate research results are to the topic being studied. The complexity of this research is highlighted by the various perspectives one can use to look at the problem. The myriad of factors, each and every one a possible source of causation, makes it impossible to generate an answer to the research question that is the true and only answer. What the methodology in this thesis has done, however, is to illustrate this complexity. This is a finding in itself, and provides valuable insight into how decisions are made at a senior political level.

Reliability is a measure of how consistent the results are, and how well they can be reproduced using a similar methodology. Some of the sources may have provided a romanticized version of the case, as they were heavily involved in it. The information provided by the respondents has been cross-checked by using biographies, newspaper articles, and other researches to confirm or reject the gathered data. At some points, it was hard to decide what information to include in the thesis because of conflicting information between the respondents that could not be verified by secondary sources. At these points, the sources were contacted to clarify the missing pieces or to elaborate on the matter. There is a factor of uncertainty when doing personal interviews and asking for people's subjective thoughts and feelings on a subject. A new set of interviews conducted by someone else may not produce the same results. The most uncertain part of the research, however, is the analysis of what factors causing the results. This research is social and not natural science. The aggregate effects of combining interview data with theoretical models initially intended for a different case, will make it challenging to reproduce the same results.

4 FINDINGS

The primary purpose of this study is to present how and why President Obama decided to increase the U.S. civil-military deployment to Afghanistan throughout 2009. This chapter will elucidate major activities and the way the distinctive decision-making process was undertaken that led to the surge up to a level of 140,000 coalition and 100,000 U.S. soldiers and civilian personnel in Afghanistan. The chapter will show strategic decisions come about. This description is beneficial for an understanding of what happened, but also as a framework for the analysis that will follow in the next chapter. The content in this chapter will be based on interviews and be supported by relevant literature.

The chapter is divided into four chronologically ordered sections, each relevant for the U.S. Afghanistan strategy. The first section, *Campaign and Elections*, will provide a context for the following sections. It will introduce some of the actors who have been interviewed for this research and who were part of the process, in addition to drawing a picture of the factors which impacted the administration's initial reasoning. The second section, *The First Surge*, is focusing on the February 2009 decision to increase the troop levels in Afghanistan. The third section, *The Second Announcement*, focuses on the March 2009 announcement for a new Afghanistan strategy incorporating increased civilian presence. Lastly, *The Final Order* is the third troop increase announcement made by President Obama at The U.S. Military Academy at West Point in December 2009. The final order is the most important decision in this study and is, therefore, the process that will be provided most attention.

Information stemming from personal interviews are cited as (person, paragraph number), whereas the paragraph number stems from the transcribed text. When a new source is introduced, he is briefly presented in the text. An overview of the process investigated is presented below.

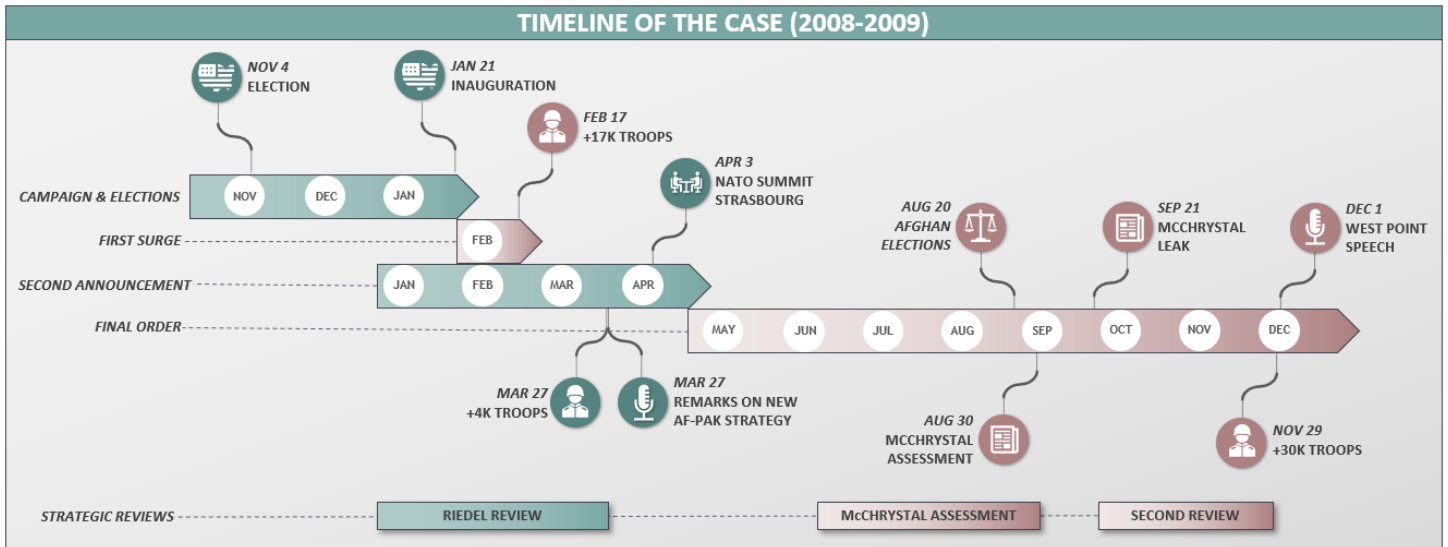


Figure 6: Timeline of the Case (2008-2009)

4.1 Campaign and Elections

During the presidential campaign in 2008, candidate Obama promised to end the U.S. war in Iraq and bring American troops home. The public opinion of the Iraq war had steadily become more negative since 2003 (Rosentiel, 2008). According to Bruce Riedel, many of Obama’s supporters focused on the ongoing war in Iraq and did not pay close attention to Afghanistan at the time (Riedel, Paragraph 21). Riedel was a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer and had briefed three previous presidents in his career before he became (then) Senator Obama’s Expert Advisor on South Asia and Counter Terrorism (CT) in the presidential campaign (Woodward, 2013, p. 88). Riedel had decided to retire from government service but after the elections in 2008 was personally asked by President Obama to chair a 60-day policy review of Afghanistan and Pakistan, an offer which he accepted (Riedel, Paragraph 4). The war in Iraq received a lot of attention and military resources, at a time where the U.S. was engaged in both conflicts at the same time. The military capabilities had been concentrated in Iraq, and many perceived the conflict in Afghanistan as a forgotten war.

In the January 2009 *Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* report to Congress, the Department of Defense (DoD) reported that al-Qaeda had reinstated safe havens in Pakistan and that the violence in Afghanistan was increasing (DoD, 2009, p. 7).

The DoD also reported that the U.S. continued “to pursue a comprehensive counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign” in which the strategy was to “clear, hold and build”. (DoD, 2009, p. 7). The chart below illustrates how the security incidents in Afghanistan had escalated from 2004 to 2008.

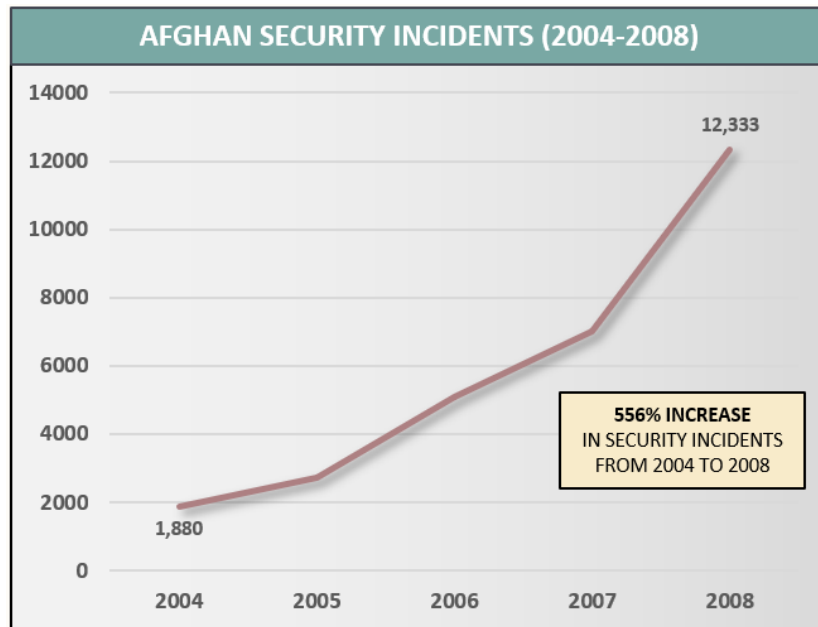


Figure 7: Afghan Security Incidents (2004-2008). Total number of security incidents, including suicide bombings, indirect attacks, IED/mine incidents, IED/mine direct attacks, and direct attacks. (SIGAR, 2017, p. 36)

Admiral Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated in a congressional hearing that “I am not convinced we are winning it in Afghanistan” because of the lack of resources to combat the escalating insurgency in Afghanistan (Mullen, 2008). In a campaign speech the same year presidential candidate Obama expressed his intentions of the war in Afghanistan:

Our troops and our NATO allies are performing heroically in Afghanistan, but I have argued for years that we lack the resources to finish the job because of our commitment to Iraq. That’s what the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said earlier this month. And that’s why, as president, I will make the fight against al-Qaeda and the Taliban the top priority that it should be. This is a war that we have to win. (Obama, 2008)

The common enemy of the U.S. in Afghanistan was al-Qaeda. “The United States did not go to war in October 2001 in Afghanistan to fight the Taliban, the purpose of going to war was to fight al-Qaeda” (Riedel, Paragraph 21). It was difficult for the U.S. to distinguish between

Taliban and al-Qaeda, although the principal goal was to prevent further international terrorism from al-Qaeda (Riedel, Paragraph 21). Obama saw the war in Iraq as a mistake but held that Afghanistan was “the good war,” which needed devoted financial and military support, but also more strategic attention based on the situation on the ground (Blanc, Paragraph 41). Jarrett Blanc was the Principal Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan at the U.S. Department of State and worked for Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, who was the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP) and a very important person for the process. The role of the SRAP was to coordinate the activities of the DoS in connection with the War in Afghanistan. Blanc was responsible for third country diplomacy on behalf of U.S. interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan, had a key role in developing and implementing the international security assistance plan for Afghanistan, directed efforts to start an Afghan-led peace process and mediated the Afghan electoral process (Carnegie, n.d.).

During the campaign, the term “good war – bad war” became a common phrase. This was a simplistic version of Obama’s views. Obama was concerned about the rebuilding of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan as a threat to the United States (Riedel, Paragraph 4). According to Douglas Lute, “the campaign rhetoric from 2008 was not as clean as it appeared. It appeared simply; I think we can expect this by way of political campaigning. Those are slogans; those are snippets; they're shorthand” (Lute, Paragraph 29). Senator Obama campaigned against the war in Iraq but also campaigned that the war in Afghanistan was one he had to win. In this campaign rhetoric, he was perceived by many to be against *all* wars, giving the American people promises to bring back the troops, when in fact, he had a clear idea that he needed to increase the focus on Afghanistan (Zeleny, 2008). Barack Obama was elected the 44th president of the United States by winning both the electoral and popular votes by a sizable margin on November 4, 2008 (Nagourney, 2008).

On November 26, 2008, outgoing President Bush attended one of his last National Security Council (NSC) meetings (Woodward, 2013, p. 40). The National Security Council is the president’s principal forum for considering national security and foreign policy concerns with his senior national security advisors and cabinet officials (White House, n.d.). The agenda of the meeting was to consider a classified report on the Afghanistan War that had been prepared by Lieutenant General Douglas Lute, also known as the “war czar” of the White House (Woodward, 2013, p. 40). General Lute was appointed by Bush in 2007 as the top NSC

deputy for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars (Woodward, 2013, p. 41). As with Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, General Lute was retained in the White House under Obama, where he became Special Assistant to the President and Senior Coordinator for Afghanistan and Pakistan. He retired from military service in 2010, and in 2013 Obama appointed Lute as the U.S. Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Council (Belfer Center, 2020).

Bush [...] in the six months of his last administration had charged me to do an assessment or review of our policy in Afghanistan to feed into the transition. To whomever was elected next president. And it was clear that there was a negative trend in Afghanistan so the idea was; let's do a review, so we have something to hand off to the new team. [...] We delivered that in, sort of October - November probably of 2008, and then we used that review to brief the Obama transition team and handed it to them. (Lute, Paragraph 2)

The presidential transition is the transfer of power from the incumbent President of the United States to the president-elect and lasts from election day until inauguration day. The transition period is very important in preparing the president-elect's first time in office. Lute explains how some decisions on Afghanistan were deferred from Bush to Obama:

In the course of that review there were some troops request that were pending, and we, at the Bush administration, asked the Obama counterparts if they would prefer for Bush to approve those troops request or would they rather do it? Given that they had campaigned on good war – bad war, it seemed like it would be an easy sort of gift to the new administration, where they could come in and prove the bona fides and approve these troops request, and that's in fact what they chose to do. (Lute, Paragraph 2)

Going into office, President-elect Obama had made campaign promises on winning the war in Afghanistan. He had inherited an increasingly violent state in Afghanistan and understood the importance of Pakistan, where he plans on how to correct the situation in the region. He decided to keep some officials from the previous administration in important positions to provide continuity. All this happened at a time when the USA was going through the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression and when the population grew tired from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

4.2 The First Surge

President Obama was inaugurated on January 21, 2009 (Obama White House, 2009a). Key cabinet members in his first administration included Joseph Biden (Vice President), Hillary R. Clinton (Secretary of State), and Robert M. Gates (Secretary of Defense). The new president had multiple imminent tasks. There was already a request for additional troops pending on the president's desk; the deferred decision from the Bush administration (Singh, Paragraph 2). Obama was aware of this request since it was briefed in the presidential transition period, and “[...] had already been in the Principals [Committee] moved on by the Bush administration” (Singh, Paragraph 2). In the first year of the Obama administration, Vikram Singh was the Senior Defense Advisor for Ambassador Holbrooke at the Department of State. He was a DoD employee sent over to work for Holbrooke's team on Afghanistan. From August 2009 he became Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (Singh, Paragraph 2).

President Obama attended his first National Security Council meeting in the Situation Room on January 23, 2009 (Woodward, 2013). In that first meeting, Obama stated, “I have campaigned on providing Afghanistan with more troops, but I haven't made a decision yet” (Woodward, 2013, p. 79). He further elaborated, “when we send them, we need to announce it in the context of a broader strategy” (Woodward, 2013, p. 79). It was, therefore, important for Obama to produce a new strategic review towards Afghanistan to consider his options.

The conventional wisdom at the time, and even now I would say, among most people was that the Iraq war sucked attention and resources away from Afghanistan at a critical moment. And this was [going to] be the administration correcting that mistake by figuring out what was needed to win in Afghanistan, the so-called good war, and that required having a real strategic review. (Singh, Paragraph 15)

It is common in the White House organizational structure to do a strategic review before a decision is made. The president asked Bruce Riedel to chair this new strategic review on Afghanistan and Pakistan, which started in January 2009 (Nasr, 2014). The review is sometimes called the first strategic review, however in this thesis the terms Riedel review and Riedel strategy will be used since that was the most commonly used term in the interviews. *In parallel* with the Riedel review, the decision to send more troops to Afghanistan happened very quickly:

[...] as I recall, 17,000 troops to secure the elections [in Afghanistan] which they had assumed was going to take place in September, because that's when they wanted them to take place. [...] he [Obama] felt very much like pressured into doing that and he didn't have time really to think about it. So, he just approved it quickly. (Rubin, Paragraph 17)

Dr. Barnett Rubin is a political scientist and an expert on Afghanistan and South Asia. From April 2009 until October 2013, Rubin was the Senior Adviser to the SRAP Holbrooke in the U.S. Department of State (Coll, 2018). "My main task, which I assigned myself, and he [Holbrooke] accepted, was to get the U.S. government to change its policy to support a political settlement with the Taliban in Afghanistan as a way to end the war" (Rubin, Paragraph 8). Rubin is supported by Riedel in that the election and postponed decision from the Bush administration required a quick decision:

Soon as he [Obama] was sworn in, the military command in Afghanistan told him that they needed immediate reinforcements. In part because of the upcoming Afghan election but mostly because they had been asking for reinforcements for the better part of six months from the Bush administration which had postponed giving an answer until the new administration came in. [...] I think Obama quite rightly felt that he was being, as we say in American-English "jammed" on this. He wasn't getting a chance to consider the broader scope of the problem. But he went ahead, and I think he sent 17,000 troops almost immediately. (Riedel, Paragraphs 5 & 7)

The first troop increase was announced without any press briefing but was given through a press release statement by the White House on February 17, 2009. Both Riedel and Rubin state that the pending troop request happened rapidly without spending time to reconsider the options in Afghanistan. The decision was made to increase the troop levels with 17,000, of which 8,000 were a Marine Expeditionary Brigade and the rest an Army Stryker Brigade (Obama White House, 2009c).

This section has given account for the first troop increase that happened right after President Obama was inaugurated. There was already a troop request awaiting approval from the newly appointed commander in chief. The Bush administration had, through General Lute, prepared a plan that required attention and a decision to increase the military deployment in Afghanistan (Woodward, 2013). The first surge happened during Obama's 30 first days in

office without having done his own strategic review and ended up amounting to 17,000 additional troops in Afghanistan.

4.3 The Second Announcement

Rather than just analyzing what to do in Afghanistan, the focus of the Riedel review was al-Qaeda, Pakistan, and the drone program (Riedel, Paragraph 10). The 60-day review was officially led by Bruce Riedel and co-chaired by Defense Undersecretary for Policy Michelle Flournoy, Richard Holbrooke, and with Douglas Lute and Lute's staff at the NSC in support (Gates, 2014). The review built upon and took into consideration three previous reviews: one by General Petraeus at CENTCOM, one by Admiral Mullen at the Joint Staff, and the previous mentioned review by General Lute at the NSC (Obama White House, 2009d). The Riedel review had a tight schedule in order to recommend a strategy that could be used in the April 2009 Strasbourg / Kehl NATO Summit. Obama needed to have a plan to present to NATO since the war in Afghanistan in 2009 was a NATO operation (Riedel, Paragraph 5).

Among the people I have interviewed, there is disagreement on the inclusiveness of the process. As an example, Rubin claims that the Riedel review was not a participatory process and that very few people partook in it (Rubin, Paragraph 4).

So, the Riedel [review] was very much a stop gap process. And did not involve a full round of interagency consultation or anything. Bruce Riedel, I don't know what his relationship was with Obama but somehow, Obama, I could say he captured the space but I don't think Bruce Riedel is a plotting bureaucrat, bureaucratic politician. But for some reason, Obama put his trust mainly in him about Afghanistan, which meant he was concerned mainly about al-Qaeda, because Bruce Riedel is not an Afghanistan or South Asia specialist, or international relations specialist, he is a CIA CT [counterterrorism] analyst. (Rubin, Paragraph 18)

However, Singh, Lute, and Riedel all claimed that the review was an interagency process; it was just a little bit different. A typical interagency process has deputy committee meetings that internally feeds the Principals Committee, in which the path to a presidential decision goes through the NSC where the president is the chair. In this early phase of Obama's presidency, the NSC and the administration were in fact still forming when the review

occurred, with political appointees trying to find their place in the interagency. (Lute, Paragraphs 5 & 9).

The first [Riedel review] was somewhat abbreviated because first of all, he had an outsider in Riedel chairing the process. [...] He came in, he had a short 60 days mandate and then he made very clear, [...] he was not [going to] stay in the government [...] The co-chairs to the Riedel committee though, were Michelle Flournoy from the Defense Department [...] And Holbrooke from State and then my team and I at the White House, we administered it. [...] So obviously, interagency. Bruce didn't have an office. We helped him, convened the meetings, run the meetings and so forth. So, it wasn't just Bruce Riedel of by himself. [...] The nature of the Riedel report reflects the fact that it took place in the first 60-days of a brand-new administration. So, it was a bit ad-hoc, but it was definitely interagency process, it just wasn't classic interagency. (Lute, Paragraph 9)

Vikram Singh was also a part of the Riedel review as he was working on the DoD component of it. He contributed DoD viewpoints in the drafting process and prepared the DoD principals and the senior leaders for the working sessions and was heavily involved in the process (Singh, Paragraph 2).

The Riedel review was done at the top level. [...] it was done as principals or deputies' level regular set of meetings, with lots of inputs from experts, with lots of outreach to experts, and you know, developed the thing that they called the Riedel review, which was basically a stock taking of the war, of the dynamic's vis-à-vis Pakistan. [...] they hinged on a very problematic thesis [...], it really hinged on the need to change Pakistan's strategic calculus, which I don't think was ever a realistic objective. (Singh, Paragraph 6)

The Riedel review identified that the enemy (al-Qaeda) had sheltered in the northern parts of Pakistan and that the focus had therefore shifted from Afghanistan to its neighboring country Pakistan.

I think the major conclusion of that review was that the problem was not the al-Qaeda problem, was not so much an Afghan problem, it was a Pakistan problem. That the brunt of the al-Qaeda infrastructure that was a danger to the United States and other

western countries, wasn't on Afghan territory anymore. They were embedded in Pakistan. (Riedel, Paragraph 8)

It further found that the Taliban was also located in Pakistan. Taliban was a threat to building a democratic government in Afghanistan, and Riedel viewed both the Taliban and al-Qaeda as members of a *syndicate of terrorists* embedded in Pakistan and Afghanistan (Riedel, 2011, p. 1).

Here again, the consensus of the review [was] that the Taliban had their sanctuary and base camps in Pakistan, their leadership was in Pakistan, their fundraising was in Pakistan, and they were getting considerable - and they still do, considerable support from the Pakistani Army and the Pakistani Intelligence Service. (Riedel, Paragraph 12)

In order to handle this situation, the Riedel review found that Pakistani government support was required.

So, this first review focused a lot on, what to do about Pakistan, what we could pressure the Pakistanis into doing, what we could tie the Pakistanis into doing. And most importantly, what we could do unilaterally with CIA drone assets. Now, because the CIA drone program is by definition a secret clandestine covert action, when the president rolled out his plan in March 2009, he doesn't talk about it - he couldn't talk about it. But if you look at the activity level, you'll see that there was a huge surge in drone operations in Pakistan. (Riedel, Paragraph 8)

The Riedel report resulted in the president announcing a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan on March 27, 2009 (Obama White House, 2009d). The main points of the strategy were highlighted in the *White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan*. which stated that:

This new strategy of focusing on our core goal - disrupt, dismantle, and eventually destroy extremists and their safe havens within both nations, although with different tactics - will require immediate action, sustained commitment, and substantial resources. The United States is committed to working with our partners in the region and the international community to address this challenging but essential security goal. (The White House, 2009, p. 6)

Riedel highlights that the main point of the strategy was to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda. “It doesn’t talk about rebuilding Afghanistan; it doesn’t talk very much about the Taliban. It mentions those things, but the goal - the three D’s [are] all about al-Qaeda. And al-Qaeda is really in Pakistan – not in Afghanistan” (Riedel, Paragraph 10).

The result of the process was that Obama, based on numbers provided from the Pentagon, made a decision in March to send 4,000 troops in addition to the troops already approved in February. “[Totally] it’s around roughly 20,000 troops. And at the time the Pentagon, and by that, I mean Gates and Petraeus who was commander of CENTCOM, said that’s enough” (Riedel, Paragraph 15). General David Petraeus was a four-star general who served as the commander in chief for U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) where he assumed command from 2008 to June 30, 2010 (U.S. Central Command, n.d.). As the CENTCOM commander, General Petraeus was responsible for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He is one of the most famous and powerful American generals since the Vietnam War (Packer, 2019).

An important element in the Riedel review was the threat it identified posed by the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The recommendation that President Obama agreed to was launching a major drone operation. The chart below illustrates how the drone activity level increased in Pakistan during Obama’s tenure.

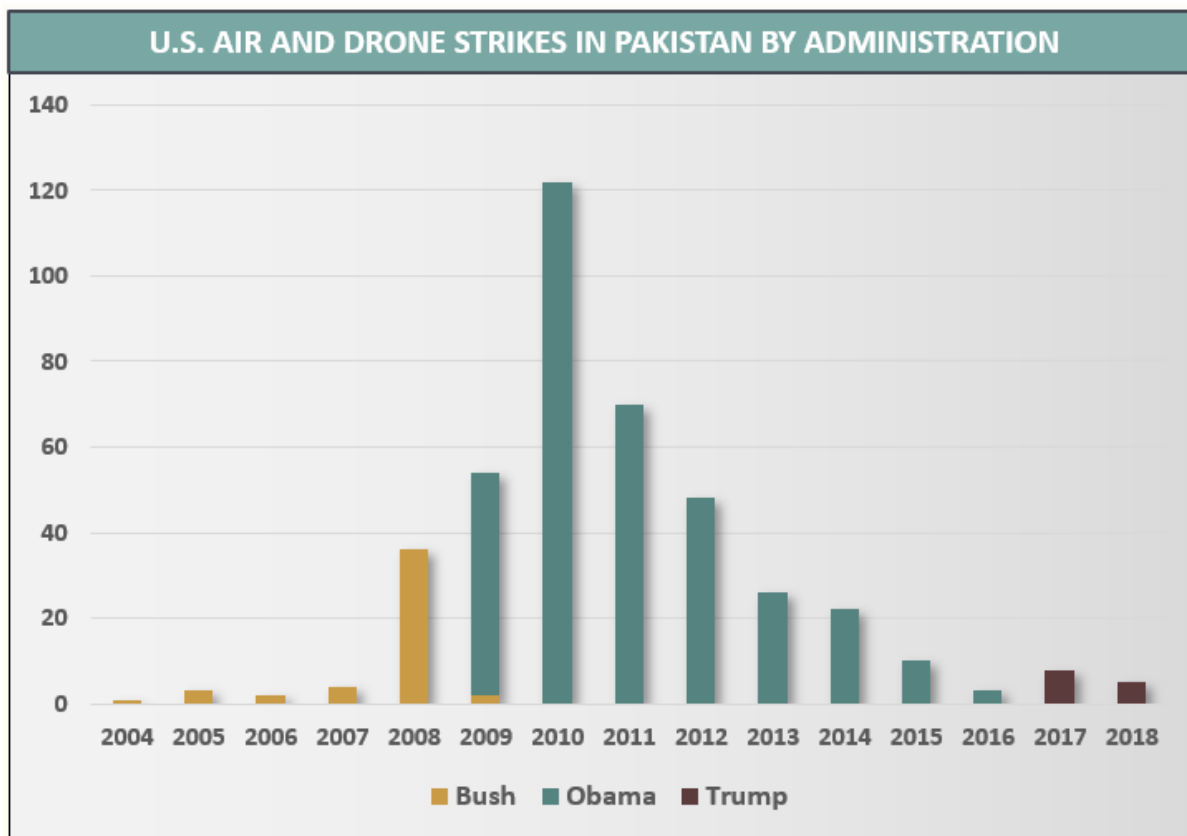


Figure 8: U.S. Air and Drone Strikes in Pakistan (New America, 2020)

This sub-chapter has presented the purpose of the first strategic review initiated by Obama for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The main contention point in this study has been how involved different agencies were in the process. Although not a typical interagency process, the process involved actors from both the White House, the State Department, and the Department of Defense. The circumstances were extraordinary, with a newly formed government, the NATO summit deadline, and an upcoming Afghan election that needed to be secured. The result of the study was additional troops to Afghanistan, the ramp-up of the drone program, and increased civilian presence in Afghanistan.

4.4 The Final Order

4.4.1 McChrystal Assessment

After the second troop increase was announced, Secretary Gates supported the president's decision even if he was deeply skeptical about two fundamental elements of the Riedel strategy. The ambitions of the strategy were "breathtaking," given its strategic goals. Gates had doubts about the required number of civilians from different agencies such as the State Department, Department of Agriculture, the Agency for International Development, and other agencies could be found and deployed. He also doubted that the U.S. could persuade Pakistan to fight the Taliban and other extremists on their side of the border (Gates, 2014, p. 342-4).

On June 8, 2009, Secretary Gates met with the new International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)¹ commander General Stanley McChrystal and asked him to do a 60-day strategic assessment of the war "and to determine any necessary changes to the mission, strategy, or how our forces were organized" (McChrystal, 2013, p. 294). This is a common military practice during a change of command:

You know the new commander typically comes in and sort of walks around, and does an assessment - sees for himself his area of responsibility and assess it. So, Stan does that, that results in this 60-page strategic assessment [...] Which he submits up through the chain of command. (Lute, Paragraph 2)

McChrystal sent his strategic assessment on Afghanistan to Gates on August 30, 2009, proposing to fully implement a counterinsurgency strategy that focused more on interaction with the local population and building governance structures (McChrystal, 2013).

Counterinsurgency is defined by NATO doctrine as "comprehensive civilian and military efforts made to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances" (NATO, 2017, p. 3) and is often referred to as COIN. The first NSC meeting on McChrystal's assessment on Afghanistan was on September 13, 2009 (Gates, 2014).

McChrystal wrote in the report that a counterterrorism (CT) strategy alone in Afghanistan would not work, as although CT operations are highly effective at *disrupting* terrorists, they

¹ ISAF was the UN mission that was tasked to support and enable the Afghan government to provide security in Afghanistan. It lasted from 11 August 2003 to 31 December 2014. (NATO, 2015)

are not the endgame to *defeat* a terrorist group (Gates, 2014, p. 364). To implement the already approved Riedel strategy, McChrystal requested more troops and asked for a fully resourced, comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign. McChrystal provided different options to the president. For different number of troops, there were different approaches to how to implement the strategy, which included sending 80,000 troops for counterinsurgency campaign in whole Afghanistan, 40,000 troops to reinforce the areas where Taliban were strongest, or 10,000 to 15,000 troops to primarily train Afghan forces (Baker, 2009). McChrystal intended to provide the “best military advice” to the president and recommended that “40,000 forces were necessary to implement our strategy within the essential time frame and with what we assessed as ‘acceptable risk’” (McChrystal, 2013, p. 345).

During the Iraq War, General Petraeus also wrote a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy. It focused on protecting civilian population centers and winning Iraqi “hearts and minds” through relationship building and development projects. In order to bring COIN to Afghanistan, more troops were needed (Clinton, 2014, p. 135). The proposed strategy was, however, not the same as used in Iraq:

We didn't use the "same strategy". We were keenly aware that Afghanistan was very different in numerous important respects from Iraq. In fact, when I was asked by Sec. Rumsfeld to do an assessment of the train and equip effort in Afghanistan on the way home from my second tour in Iraq, the first slide in my briefing to him was titled "Afghanistan (does not equal sign) Iraq" and it listed the many categories in which there were major differences between the two countries. (Petraeus, Paragraph 8)

Petraeus supported McChrystal, and elaborated on the principles of the COIN strategy in the NSC meetings in the White House (Gates, 2014).

That said, we did seek to employ the principles that should guide any comprehensive civil-military counterinsurgency campaign, as that was the only construct that would enable achievement of the missions in Afghanistan for the period of the surge there. (Petraeus, Paragraph 8)

The goal of the COIN strategy was modeled to *clear* an area of insurgents, *hold* it so they could not return, *build* it by investing in infrastructure and governance of the Afghan capacity and then *transfer* it to Afghan authorities (Lute, Paragraph 33). General McChrystal’s “initial assessment after assuming command warned that the Taliban and other insurgent groups had

the momentum and were threatening hugely important cities and lines of communication in Afghanistan.” (Petraeus, Paragraph 2). The assessment was leaked to the Washington Post on September 21, 2009, at a time when it was being reviewed by President Obama and his national security team (Woodward, 2009). The leak was a significant driver for the NSC to respond to McChrystal’s request for more troops (Blanc, Paragraph 73).

[...] which unfortunately gets leaked to the Washington Post, [...] and the first line is the real, as we say, the “money line”. [...] It’s pretty dark opening sentence. Okay, that then kicks off and initiates the second strategic review of the year, which is the one which now considers McChrystal’s request for additional 40,000 troops. (Lute, Paragraph 2)

The new ISAF commander’s assessment that more troops were needed was not expected, and was not how the process was supposed to work, “this was not an intentional two step thing [the strategic review]” (Blanc, Paragraph 67). It also indicated that the situation was more desperate than was commonly thought to be the case (Lute, Paragraph 17). Because of the leak, the second strategic review process in the NSC started with a great sense of urgency.

You know, if the review had not leaked, if it had just stayed as a classified government document, I still think it would've sparked a review because of the substance of the paper. The fact that it leaked maybe added urgency to the review. But it also eroded some of the confidence or the trust within the team, among the team members. (Lute, Paragraph 17)

The starting point for the second review was that the U.S. was not to give up on Afghanistan, although the war did not go well. Obama “was sort of stuck with the three options that were framed up in the McChrystal review” (Singh, Paragraph 24).

I feel like the president’s realistic choices were sort of 20, 40, 80, right. It was like pick the middle - there is a joke in defense establishment that leaders will always be given PowerPoint that gives them three options of which the people putting up the presentation is aiming for the middle option, right. This is a sort of running joke, that you'll get [...] light, medium, heavy and you're hoping to get medium. And you'll sort of construct it, so that medium is a viable outcome, and you make medium to become what you wanted in the beginning. (Singh, Paragraph 24)

McChrystal built upon the Riedel strategy and provided what he conceived as rational options for a fully resourced, comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign. The situation in Afghanistan, combined with the pressure stemming from the leak, contributed to an urgency in resolving the issues in his assessment.

4.4.2 The Second Review

The second review began in September and lasted until November 2009 (Lute, Paragraph 2). The second review was being run from the White House with General Lute running the process, tasking the various papers and analysis that came together into the big review. “A lot of expertise brought in a lot of analysis, for us it was just like a, a nonstop turning of request for information, analysis, papers, feeding into this decision-making process” (Singh, Paragraph 36). Meetings were held at Holbrooke’s level before the information went up to the deputies and the president. The review was taken extremely serious by President Obama, who sat through multiple long sessions going through the findings of the review. The process “was very rigorous, I remember, we were working to midnight. There were constant questions from the White House” (Singh, Paragraph 36). “I think you see it in the speech in West Point, the gravity which he was approaching [it with]” (Singh, Paragraph 34).

The main difference between Riedel review and the second review, which was driven by the NSC, was that the president chaired the latter, something which is quite uncommon. The overall process of the review was driven by a desire both to not have a major effort fail and to be able to help the partners that the U.S. had been supporting for a long time (Singh, Paragraph 17).

The president had a lot of considerations to make. The annual cost of 100,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan would be \$120B a year (Lute, Paragraph 7). It is understood that Obama wanted a more thorough review of the Taliban problem in the second review.

He didn’t want a thorough review of what has been called Af-Pak strategy, a term I don’t like to use. He was very comfortable with the Pakistan strategy and with the al-Qaeda strategy, with the drones[...] Barack Obama is a very thorough thinker. There is no impulse decision making in Barack Obama. It’s just not the way he is wired. He sits down and studies a problem, and you can give him five 60-page papers one afternoon, and they will all be read the next morning, and they would all be marked up

with questions or follow up. He's thorough, and that's what happened in the fall of 2009. (Riedel, Paragraph 17)

A further complicating factor was the civil-military cooperation recommended by McChrystal, a consideration that required engagement from multiple agencies.

A comprehensive, civil-military counterinsurgency requires all U.S. government departments and agencies to work together and to achieve unity of purpose - and also requires the same from all the elements of the coalition and the elements of the host nation, ideally, neighboring nations, as well! (Petraeus, Paragraph 4)

The second strategic review process started with the ends – with what the U.S. was trying to achieve – and it did not get down to the troop options until after a while (Lute, Paragraph 21). While the strategy started to be all about Afghanistan, when the team began to look at what the U.S. objectives were, it became apparent that Pakistan was very important. Pakistan, a country with more than 50 nuclear weapons, was in an unstable security situation and the Pakistani Taliban was therefore seen as a rising danger.

The objectives more and more pulled us towards the importance of Pakistan. That's actually not sufficiently reported so this may be something that you want to think about. But one of the things Obama did was link Afghanistan and Pakistan as a set. That Pakistan could not be stable without Afghanistan being stable and vice versa. That the two were linked, and they are linked fundamentally because of the demographics. They are linked because of the Pashtun people who obviously span that Afghan-Pakistan border, and of course, who fuels the Taliban on both sides of the border. (Lute, Paragraph 21)

The strategic review team discussed what they should do in Pakistan, and compared it to the tasks at hand in Afghanistan. The issue was the subject of much disagreement. A full-scale counterinsurgency operation against the Taliban in a country the size of Afghanistan would be an enormous undertaking. “In a normal counterinsurgency, you're probably looking at half a million troops on the ground. If you count Afghans, NATO, the American forces together, we never came anywhere close to a force structure that big” (Riedel, Paragraph 13).

Didn't we have to conduct a full-fledged counterinsurgency nationwide in Afghanistan and promote Afghanistan as a source of stability in south central Asia region, in order

to secure our objectives in Pakistan? And frankly, the answer was no, we didn't need all of that. And it was gonna be too expensive, alright. [...] then the question became, could we just use Afghanistan as a counterterrorism platform, which eventually we did by the way. (Lute, Paragraph 21)

Having military forces on the ground in Afghanistan inevitably involved Taliban, as the Taliban would attack the coalition forces. It was not a choice for the coalition to decide to only fight internationally-focused terrorist groups. "I believe that there was going to be a Taliban insurgency unless we came to a political settlement, which was not then, unfortunately, I believe, a prioritized objective of the strategic review." (Blanc, Paragraph 29).

[the review] is also classified but it really did dig in to every aspect, and it really did highlight the issues with corruption, misgovernance, the reality of the fact of that, the Taliban was not seen as legitimate and significant chunks of country, not just as a host force that opposed the whole nation. They got a lot of insights that would, that might lead you to think that more resources are actually risky. (Singh, Paragraph 17)

The issue was that the McChrystal's pessimistic military assessment that hinted towards a large troop increase now became a public document. Some of the senior civilian leaders of the second strategic review saw this as an attempt by the military to make its case for more troops public, a deliberate leak intended to weigh the process in favor of McChrystal's assessment. "That eroded the trust among military and civilian officials and that trust deficit continued to flavor the policies on Afghanistan but maybe even more broadly for U.S. thereafter" (Lute, Paragraph 17).

When the review came down to discussing numbers, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates is identified as one of the key persons steering where the policy ended up. When the president was struggling with the number of troops, Gates came up with the compromise 30,000 American, and 10,000 coalition, which then added up to McChrystal's 40,000 (Lute, Paragraph 33).

[I] sometimes believed that NSC was setting unrealistically high objectives for what we would get in terms of especially materials support from international partners. But I will say actually, that we largely met those goals, despite my view at the beginning that they were unrealistic. (Blanc, Paragraph 8)

Gates further recommended that, if the operation was an 18 to 24-month process, the U.S. could use the same battalion or more sized clearing force and use it several times in Afghanistan because the Afghans would be able to secure the already cleared areas.

If we're unable to do this in 18-24 months, then the model was flawed. And what we suspected, and frankly what has now played out in the subsequent 10 years, is that we never got to the build and transfer phases because of the lack of Afghan capacity. [...] And so, the model broke down, but the 18-24 months - you asked who was the key player - that actually came from Bob Gates. What's interesting about this, what 10 years later is that people critique Obama for pulling 18-24 months out of the hat, sort of capricious decision on his part that wasn't based on anything. No! It was actually based on the recommendation of the Secretary of Defense. So those were key contributing factors to where the policy ended up. (Lute, Paragraph 33)

Among the other principals in the NSC, the strongest supporter of the Pentagon was Secretary of State Clinton, who fully endorsed Gates' proposal. The most significant critic was Vice President Biden, who wanted a much smaller footprint. Biden "really never articulated what specific program he had in mind; he was mostly just critical of the Gates / Clinton proposal" (Riedel, Paragraph 13) Having a limited time frame was also met with skepticism from within the military.

A military campaign is a test of wills in many respects. It is not helpful if one's adversary has a sense that we will definitely begin reducing our resources at a date certain rather than when certain conditions are met. (Petraeus, Paragraph 26)

Vikram Singh sums up the second review process like this: "So it was a lot of meetings, it was very intensive, [...] but at the end of the day, the choices still felt like it was what was on those slides that were leaked" (Singh, Paragraph 36). The final decision was Obama's and was a compromise between multiple options.

The military wanted more troops, we wanted a political settlement, they didn't get more troops and we didn't get a political settlement. [...] He was letting the military know that they weren't having it their way. The target for that was in his mind the U.S. military, letting them know that they didn't have an open check book and an unlimited time frame to try to win the war. (Rubin, Paragraph 77)

The second strategic review is complete by the end of November, the decision made November 29, and the new strategy presented by President Obama at the December 1, 2009, West Point speech. He “announces the 40,000 troops surge. 30,000 U.S. and 10,000 allies, to include some Norwegian troops, I’m sure, and takes the U.S. total to a 100,000 and the coalition total to a 140,000” (Lute, Paragraph 2). Obama announces not only a military, but also a civilian surge.

These sort of decisions also resulted in things that you wouldn’t expect. I mean that resulted in the Deputy Secretary of State, tracking to the individual, this one aid officer, this one counter narcotics person, or this one agriculture advisor in some little district in Afghanistan. It was very strange, because it became this big accountability issue for the State Department – ‘are you delivering?’ So, the civilians were like, having to say yes, we got the agricultural advisor in Marga or whatever. When you step back and look at it, it seems insane. I think one big factor was like, we would do a comprehensive surge. (Singh, Paragraph 40)

In order to meet the demand for a comprehensive civilian-military effort, provincial reconstruction teams were set up with senior civilian representatives all over Afghanistan. Every military commander had a civilian partner in the field.

It was an interesting experiment, right, [...] that came out differently because of the review of the demand for having a more integrated civilian military approach. But in a way, maybe we didn’t understand what integrated civilian military approach really should mean. It probably doesn’t just mean that you put a civilian everywhere you have a military one. (Singh, Paragraph 36)

Notwithstanding any difficulties in creating a good civil-military cooperation, the immediate results were seen to be positive.

For what it’s worth, I believe those objectives were accomplished - the momentum of the Taliban was halted and reversed in key areas; the development of Afghan security forces and select institutions was accelerated; transition of security tasks was begun in select locations; al-Qaeda was prevented from re-establishing the kind of sanctuary they had when they planned the 9/11 attacks in eastern Afghanistan, when the Taliban ruled the country. And of course, Afghanistan provided a superb platform for CT operations in the region, including bringing Osama bin Laden to justice. Beyond that,

violence was down, year on year, for the better part of 2011. Those achievements would not have been a strictly C-T campaign or other alternative construct. (Petraeus, Paragraph 8)

This section has given account for the intensive interagency process between the agencies and how the process was run by NSC. The leak of McChrystal's assessment being a public document complicated not only the process but also the relationship between the team members. The principals had a set of alternative choices between the CT+ or COIN campaign following the discussion of troop numbers. The discussions of a political settlement with Taliban never made it to the Principals Committee. The final order directed the level of troops, had a clear statement of the mission, and supplementing it with a timeline to bring back the troops.

4.4.3 Summary

The last phase leading up to President Obama's final order on November 29, 2009, lasted longer and was more complex than the previous two decision making processes. While the conditions earlier in 2009 had forced him into making quick decisions, he this time wanted to do a comprehensive review before formulating a strategy. The public leak of McChrystal's assessment for Afghanistan put pressure into completing that second strategic review, and also sparked mistrust within the team that produced it. The result was nevertheless a strategy based on civilian-military cooperation, which included the 40,000-troop increase that McChrystal initially recommended.

5 ANALYSIS

This study sought to answer the research question of how and why President Obama in 2009 decided to increase the deployment to Afghanistan. The previous chapter was dedicated to describing the *how* of that question. It showed how Obama in 2009 initiated two different strategy reviews, approved three troops increases, and how the leak of McChrystal's assessment caused a sense of urgency that drove the December 1 announcement of the surge. The chapter showed a clear path towards a strategy of counterinsurgency, where the U.S. fought both al-Qaeda and the Taliban. It did not, however, show why this solution was chosen over alternative options like negotiations with the Taliban or a counterterrorism strategy. The previous chapter did not analyze the dynamic factors that influenced the strategic review. That task is left for this chapter, which will address the *why*. It will seek to understand the underlying factors that contributed to the process and decisions. It will not analyze and discuss the findings in chronological order; however, the dominant factors of the analysis are on the three main models of Allison's theory. In this way, both rational (Model I), organizational (Model II) and personal (Model III) reasons for why the strategy ended up like it did will be discussed. The term *strategy* in this chapter is concerned with the strategy that underpinned Obama's final order, whereas the first strategic review is explicitly labeled the Riedel review. As this part of the analysis will go a little bit further "under the skin" of what happened in the process, more of the information in this chapter will be anonymous than in the previous.

5.1 Model I Rational Actor Model

As President and Commander in Chief, Obama sought security for his nation. This was the primary objective behind the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan. Going into office, President Obama was clear that he wanted to succeed in Afghanistan. One of the first tasks the president started once in office was exactly what he promised during campaigning; to contribute more attention to Afghanistan and to give it the resources it needed. Obama declared these intentions to the public and seemed firm on making the decisions necessary in order to win the war in Afghanistan. According to Model I, a rational actor selects the alternative that rank highest in terms of his goals and objectives (Allison, 1999). A strategy needs to be clear on its ways, means, and ends. Without enough information, making a value-maximizing strategy that addresses these key factors is difficult. It is therefore of interest to understand what information the decision-making was based on.

5.1.1 The Threat

A key element in formulating a strategy to handle a threat to the security of the United States, is to understand who or what the threat is. When Obama came into office, Osama bin Laden was determined a serious threat until he could be captured and brought to justice. The Taliban and al-Qaeda used Pakistan as their hub. One of the major threats with al-Qaeda and bin Laden being in Pakistan was the nuclear arsenal of Pakistan, and the risk that these could end up in the hands of al-Qaeda. Not only were terrorist-controlled nuclear weapons a threat, but also the fact that Pakistan was financing the terrorist groups, as mentioned by one of the respondents. Decision-makers tend to construct estimates of the involved risk in a decision, which affects the risk they decide to take. If the risk is overestimated, decisions will reflect less risk-taking than is intended, and if the risk is underestimated, decisions will reflect higher risk-taking than is intended (March, 1994). In this case, the perceived risk of al-Qaeda was seen as very serious, making the prevention of future terrorist attacks a top priority for the U.S.

Two of the sources recommended looking closer at the role the intelligence community played in formulating the strategy. During the second review, the president tasked agencies that are usually not part of the formal structure of the NSC to update the cabinet. Every meeting at the NSC began with an intelligence update, including threat assessments by Dr. Peter Lavoy, the deputy for analysis at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence

(DNI) (Lute, Paragraph 25). The cabinet members' assessment was greatly influenced by the knowledge passed on from the DNI. These briefings also supported McChrystal's assessment. Taliban and al-Qaeda were perceived as significant threats to the United States and its allies.

An interesting observation from the interviews is the administration's somewhat diffused understanding of the relationship and cooperation between the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Riedel viewed the both as parts of a terrorist syndicate, and highlighted alliances between some of their leaders. Taliban sheltered al-Qaeda in Afghanistan but were not involved in planning the 9/11 attacks. Al-Qaeda is a global terrorist organization with global goals. The Taliban use terrorism as a tactic, but their goals are confined to Afghanistan. They believe they are fighting a foreign occupation of their country (Rubin, Paragraph 96). During the second review, Vice President Biden spoke about wiping out the Taliban (Woodward, 2013). This argument shows that cabinet officials did not understand how the Taliban was an integrated part of Afghanistan that could not simply be wiped out. The U.S. difficulty of distinguishing the two in 2009 was not ideal for formulating a comprehensive strategy. During the summer of 2009, the Taliban was winning more territory, and the U.S. and NATO were certainly not winning the war. The threat level in Afghanistan had increased, and according to many observers in Washington and Afghanistan, the situation was both critical and deteriorating. The threat informed the need for the U.S. to evaluate different courses of action. Each course of action will according to Allison (1999) produce a set of consequences which may constitute costs and benefits. The two main options to consider were a political and a military option. These options are not mutually exclusive.

5.1.2 Political Options

One source highlighted that a key ambition for the U.S. was to engage with Pakistan, India, and the central Asia republics (Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan), and through informal channels with Iran. This ambition was based on the understanding that Afghan's Tajik history since the 1960s was influenced by the strategic interest of their neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan (Barfield, 2010). Since the senior leadership of al-Qaeda was in Pakistan, the vital U.S. interests were further drawn towards Pakistan. The U.S. understood that Afghanistan would not be stable without Pakistan being stable. The U.S. conducted major drone operations and surveillance activities in Pakistani territory; however, the U.S. did not

consider Pakistan as a reliable partner. They needed to strengthen the alliance with Pakistan in order to coerce them to stop the terrorist funding.

The respondents that worked for Holbrooke at the DoS mentioned the option of a possible political solution through a negotiated settlement with the Taliban to stop the war.

Ambassador Holbrooke, and more ambivalently Secretary Clinton, wanted to engage in direct informal dialogue with the Taliban. The strategic review did not discuss the option of negotiating or entering into a dialogue with the Taliban, and there was no decision memo that reached the president's desk on this subject until early 2010 (Rubin, Paragraph 97).

It is difficult to get a clear picture of the assessments made regarding this option. If one applies Model 1, the choice taken would indicate that a political solution was not perceived as the best value-maximizing choice (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). The sources from the DoS expressed their frustration about not being heard in the NSC. There was never a discussion about how the U.S. could achieve a political settlement in Afghanistan during the second strategic review – even if Holbrooke and his team were seeking to cooperate with the Taliban to fight al-Qaeda. Many saw negotiations with the Taliban at this stage as impossible. One of the respondents mentioned that “Obama was open for a negotiation with the Taliban, but they were not interested”. As the discussion under Model III will highlight, the option was not regarded as being realistic. Today, the U.S. has entered an agreement with the Taliban through the “Agreement for Bringing Peace in Afghanistan”. It has also been working actively to have intra-afghan negotiations between the Afghan government in Kabul and Taliban started and to pave the way for a peace process in Afghanistan (U.S. Department of State, 2020). Some of the respondents claim that a peace process was more realistic in 2009 than it is today – because in 2009, the U.S. had much more leverage.

5.1.3 Military Options

During the transition phase, the president-elect knew that a request for more troops was already waiting on his desk. But he felt hesitant in approving them right away without having a clear strategy on how to address the issue (Riedel, Paragraph 17). From the findings, we see that the Obama administration developed a clear view on how to achieve the state's goals. Most of the focus in the strategic reviews were how to achieve the political goals using primarily military force. A military surge, through a counterinsurgency operation, was seen as the key means to achieve the political objectives. This reasoning is logical. The threat was

violent, and in order to stop a violent threat, the use of force is necessary. Obama directed two strategic reviews.

The shorthand answer to [...] why did we do this twice in the first 9 months of a brand-new administration when the economy is crumbling... Which is not what Obama wanted to do is because we took a short cut the first time on the first review. And then we had a new commander go doing assessment and come up say: “Hey, we're short”.
(Lute, Paragraph 7)

If the McChrystal leak hadn't happened, the second strategy may have ended differently. The leak created an urgency that perhaps bypassed the checks for rational choice. This is not to say that the second review was not needed – it was – because the first review was seen by some as a failed strategy that did not work out (Singh, Paragraph 15). The research shows that the only real new discussions the second review offered was the number of troops that McChrystal required.

The Riedel review, because it stopped short of assessing the resources required to do what the review said we were going to do. As I said, there was an unwritten assumption that the number of troops either there, or enroute, would be sufficient.
(Lute, Paragraph 7)

The reason why the Riedel review stopped short of assessing the resources was also because the Riedel review had different priorities: “Pakistan and drones were the top priority of the review. They were the means to the goal of defeating al-Qaeda.” (Riedel, Paragraph 29). This is remarkably similar to a typical counterterrorism (CT) approach. A CT strategy was Biden's preferred choice. It mainly meant to add CT forces and to hunt the enemy. CT involved precise lethal attacks aimed primarily against terrorist suspects, a small group or a single building. A CT campaign requires fewer forces than a protect-the-population counterinsurgency campaign, a choice that appealed to Biden because of the lesser troop requirement. The reason why the CT alternative never became a rational choice was because McChrystal wrote a two-page memo stating that “CT wouldn't work” in Afghanistan (Woodward, 2013, pp. 234-235). “I'd answered that, in my estimation, a more holistic effort than a counterterrorism capture-and-kill campaign was required to leave Afghanistan stable” (McChrystal, 2013, p.349).

One issue was that many of the military resources required to fight the war in Afghanistan were still in Iraq in early 2009. Another issue the president was dealing with was the most significant financial crisis and deepest economic recession since the nineteen-thirties (Cassidy, 2018). The cost of having that many troops in Afghanistan was \$120 billion a year (Lute, Paragraph 7), a tough prioritization both financially and politically given that this was at a time when many Americans were losing their jobs and homes. At the other hand, Obama was facing pressure from Congress. The war was a high priority among many members of Congress, and some of them criticized the president for not doing what the military commanders were asking for, by approving more troops for deployment to Afghanistan.

5.1.4 The Choice

The president wanted to make the best possible choice on how to tackle the war in Afghanistan. However, many issues needed to be solved at the same time. When he came into office, there was already a request for more troops waiting for him. At the same time, he needed to develop a clear direction and strategy, while still handling domestic pressure caused by an unprecedented financial crisis. Model I argue that problem and pressure in the “strategic marketplace” yield probability of occurrence (Allison, 1969). Obama had domestic pressure to deliver on his campaign promises. During his presidential campaign, he was criticized for not being tough enough on foreign policy and military issues, and he wanted to prove his critics wrong by showing resolve. Within the first 100 days, he increased the troop levels twice. The findings show that the Obama administration formulated and had clear goals and objectives for the military engagement throughout both reviews. First and foremost, the final strategy focused on increasing the troop levels in the military surge for a counterinsurgency strategy. President Obama addressed the following objectives as a summary of his objectives for Afghanistan (Obama White House, 2009e):

- i. Deny al-Qaeda a safe haven
- ii. Reverse the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government
- iii. Strengthen the capacity of Afghan national security forces and government, so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan's future
- iv. Work with the U.S. partners, the United Nations, and the Afghan people to pursue an effective civilian strategy that enables the Afghan government to take advantage of improved security.

- v. Act with recognition that the success in Afghanistan is inextricably linked to the U.S. partnership with Pakistan.

He also specified that the troops would be brought home within 18 months (Obama White House, 2009e). Meanwhile, members of Holbrooke's team were monitoring discussions with purported Taliban representatives by a variety of countries and organizations. This happened without any direct contact with the Taliban, because it was still not authorized at the time. They tried, but failed, to have the option of a negotiated settlement considered in the strategic review (Rubin, Paragraph 98).

5.1.5 Discussion

Perceived arising threats make a nation act, and the U.S. selected actions to maximize its strategic goals and objectives as predicted by Allison (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). President Obama and his administration were rational actors in identifying the way forward for the United States in Afghanistan. The principal means to reach these goals were seen through the military perspective to fight al-Qaeda and the Taliban with force. U.S military operations in Afghanistan were means to limit the spread of international terrorism by defeating al-Qaeda and their capability to attack as they did in 2001. The reviews show that the U.S. intentions were never to seek reconciliation with the Taliban, nor to build infrastructure or to make significant investments in Afghanistan in any of the approved strategies. The U.S. policy was not in favor of nation-building, other than strengthening the Afghan national security forces and enabling the country to take care of itself. Model I acknowledge the existence of several actors in a government. In this case this can be exemplified by the difference in the military and civilian objectives. Their behavior towards the objective was quite distinctive, with the military pulling towards a surge and some civilians towards a political solution (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

The objectives behind the counterinsurgency strategy have been criticized for being too ambitious. The goals of disrupting and defeating al-Qaeda through a normal counterinsurgency strategy required many more troops (upwards towards 500,000) than what was made available (Riedel, Paragraph 13). How could the surge be the value-maximizing choice if it was not attainable with the available resources? A potential explanation for this was that the final strategy, although labeled counterinsurgency, was a compromise between different strategies.

So, VP Biden, as you probably know, [said] that we should narrow our military focus in Afghanistan, to focus on our real objective there, which is counterterrorism, right. The reason that we were there to begin with. That was still largely militarization, that there was always a question of military strategy. What the military is trying to do, it's not to build up an Afghan national security force, it's not to fight the Taliban, it's to combat internationally focused terrorist groups. I completely agree that, that was our actual strategic objective in Afghanistan. (Blanc, Paragraph 29)

General Lute explained that the counterinsurgency strategy would become very expensive, but that the "question became, could we just use Afghanistan as a counterterrorism platform, which eventually we did by the way" (Lute, Paragraph 21). General Petraeus stated that the strategy was designed as a full civil-military counterinsurgency campaign, however that is was constrained by time and resources - especially ground forces (Petraeus, Paragraph 33). COIN was the approved and the implemented military doctrine. However, that may not be the case in practice, and VP Biden's suggestion may have been close to the actual solution.

The best available information must be available for making a rational choice. "[The strategic review provided] very little value, because it did not engage with the real issues, and that was not based on sound analysis or knowledge of Afghanistan, and the situation on the ground" (Rubin, Paragraph 69). This points to missing links in the rational decision making. When applying Model I to the research question it becomes clear that the model, due to its formulation, can contribute to making decision-making appear rational, even if the data that the decisions were based upon were not sufficiently refined. While the actions of the U.S. can be viewed as rational based on their perceived threats and options, it is interesting to analyze what the situational awareness of the principal actors in the process was based on.

A further interesting point to note is that the goals and objectives Obama decided to go ahead with were similar to the ones before he took office. The COIN campaign was already established and implemented in Afghanistan before Obama became president. It became an official strategy when National Security Advisor General Jones during the summer of 2009 included it in an NSC policy memorandum (Petraeus, Paragraph 27). This invites the question: How open were the administration for new ideas on how to solve the issue?

Happenings in foreign affairs are conceived as actions chosen by the nation (Allison, 1969). This section has shown the perceived threats, options and associated costs and benefits as

perceived by the U.S. government. It has also shown how the goals and actions seem to have been based on reasonable, rational choices given the nation's objectives (Allison, 1969). The findings suggest that the Obama Administration were mostly fixated on numbers and a limited set of options. This was all deducted from the objectives and the primary interest of the administration. The respondents were pointing towards many sets of options, but at the end of the day the main U.S. interest was to prevent another 9/11. The fight against terrorism was rationally justified by any means to achieve that end. That also seems to have blurred the administration's ability to distinguish between al-Qaeda and the Taliban, where they failed to understand the Taliban's position in Afghanistan. This assessment relies heavily on the benefit of hindsight, and the U.S. has now acknowledged Taliban as a partner to participate within the peace agreement for Afghanistan.

Using Model I, one can view the U.S. as a rational unitary decision-maker that chooses actions in response to a strategic problem that it faces. In reality, however, the nation is far from unitary. And as this section has shown, not acting on the best possible information can result in choices that in hindsight do not appear rational. There are multiple processes that influence the choices of the nation. This is a topic for the discussion on Model II and III.

5.2 Model II Organizational Behavior Model

Model II places its significance on the role and influence of organizational logic and mission as well as standard operating procedures in foreign policymaking. Model II can be understood less as deliberate choices of leaders, more as occurrences that are outputs of organizational functionality according to a standard sequence of behavior (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

The top organizations in this case have been the White House, with the president and the NSC; the DoD, the DoS, and the intelligence community. The primary government agency advocating for a troop increase was the DoD. This conclusion is supported by several observations. First, the strategy left on the president's desk in January, which Obama approved without much time for consideration, was heavily influenced by the military and the COIN doctrine. Second, the operation in Afghanistan was primarily a military one, and it was therefore also natural that the new strategy would have a heavy military perspective. Third, counterinsurgency was the domain of the military. The concept of COIN was embedded in military doctrines, such as the Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24 (Counterinsurgency), which General Petraeus was responsible for updating in 2006. Lastly, the combination of the perceived threat level in Afghanistan, McChrystal's report requesting more troops, and the urgency caused by the leak, made it difficult for new views to make their way to the table.

The NSC staff was also a key player in the process. They provided the central coordination and control of the strategy development:

I had a team of about a dozen people who did South Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. But we were mostly Afghanistan - Pakistan. In the fall [second] review, we ran it. I mean we set up the meetings, we wrote the preparatory materials that went out to the agency participants. We wrote the president's preparation memo, we choreographed the meetings, we wrote the summaries of the meetings that then fed the next meetings. [...]. So, there's typically a feedback loop, so what happened in this meeting, how does that then set the agenda for the next meeting. With whom do we need to coordinate for the next meeting and all of that. All of that sort of administration, the running of the review, my team did. (Lute, Paragraph 23)

To perform complex routines, the behavior of large numbers of individuals must be coordinated and that requires Standard Operating Procedures (SOP); rules according to which things are done (Allison, 1969).

5.2.1 Standard Operating Procedures

A key question is to what extent the DoD considered other ways of producing information on conditions, threats and opportunities. The already approved strategy based on the Riedel review was what the commander in Afghanistan was trying to implement. However, to do so, McChrystal needed many more troops than already assigned to Afghanistan. By framing the problem as a military problem, the tools in the military toolbox appear to be the most appropriate tools to solve it. McChrystal was expected to do a full counterinsurgency campaign in order to “clear, hold & build”. In order to do so, McChrystal was short of resources. When Secretary Gates asked McChrystal for a recipe for success in Afghanistan based on the Riedel review, he triggered organizational behavior that drew from established procedures in the military command (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). Subunits of an organization are inclined to handle situation they deem most important but will have a hard time cooperating with other units without SOPs (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). The core output of this process will stem from the established organizational processes, although the leaders (in this case Gates and McChrystal) do have some flexibility in adjusting their course.

While it is not the intent of this thesis to investigate how the DoD sought to conduct COIN in Afghanistan, for Model II, it is interesting to understand the organizational SOPs that produce the organizational output. U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24 (FM 3-24) provides an in-depth manual on COIN as it provides the procedure to carry out counterinsurgency operations. It specifies the requirement of being integrated into a strategy that employs all instruments of national power to be effective (U.S. Army, 2006, p. 2-1). It highlights that a “successful COIN operation meets the contested population’s needs to the extent needed to win popular support while protecting the population from the insurgents. Effective COIN operations ultimately eliminate insurgents or renders them irrelevant.” (U.S. Army, 2006, p. 2-1). A fully resourced COIN campaign is a long-term endeavor, a fact that contradicts the timeline for a withdrawal of troops that Obama established.

The leak initiated a process to find a solution to McChrystal’s request, and even though he promoted a civil-military counterinsurgency campaign, and FM 3-24 highlights the importance of all national power being implemented, it was not clear what role the DoS had in that strategy. Therefore, the interagency process was leaning towards the DoD, with the elements from the DoS, especially Holbrooke’s office, having a hard time being heard. Singh highlighted that: “[civil-military cooperation] probably doesn’t just mean that you put a

civilian everywhere you have a military one” (Singh, Paragraph 36). Without having the opportunity to explore their objectives in depth, it seemed like the DoS were working to get their part implemented into the already established strategy.

So, we wrote papers about threat reduction, how do you use politics to lower the level of threat faced by the Afghan state, to the point where it may be able to provide for its own security without massive international assistance. But that involved negotiations with the Taliban and so on, also regional outreach as well. So, however it was never discussed in the Principals Committee. (Rubin, Paragraph 22)

DoS worked on an alternative course of action which was not discussed in the Principals Committee. They continued their work a path towards a political solution independent of the work and directions from the NSC. This process has continued until this day.

The process leading President Obama towards his final decision was a thorough and intensive process that involved many agencies. Many actors were involved producing reports, gathering information and briefing the Principals Committee, and it seems that most of them were in favor of McChrystal’s assessment to increase troop levels. The meetings were run by the NSC, which also meant that the NSC decided the topics to be addressed and heard by the principals. The inner workings of the NSC may have impacted the information that the principals were getting through the NSC’s internal operating procedures. Looking back towards the various assessments and reviews that prepared the strategy, one can see a resemblance between them. They are all heavily based on assessments from the military or intelligence community, and they are all influencing and impacting the next assessment or review.

5.2.2 Discussion

The last assessment on Afghanistan under President Bush was done by General Lute, and it was on this information that the recommendation for President Obama’s first troop increase was based. Riedel had been a Senior Advisor to Obama’s campaign before he was tasked to chair the first review. He, a former CIA analyst, worked with an Under Secretary from the DoD, and a former military general, and their review was based on three assessments from General Lute, General Petraeus, and Admiral Mullen. They all come from organizations that have common cultures and ways of thinking, and one could assess that this group of people

were trained to look for threats. The Defense and Intelligence communities cooperate closely and share information in many cases. This, on the other hand, might be very different from how the DoS operates, as the DoS seeks to promote U.S. interests through diplomacy, advocacy, and assistance.

Allison describes how governments' actions in any occurrence follow from the established routines and the choice of the leaders based on information and estimates provided by existing routines. Often do implementation reflect previously established routines, as in this case, the strategies that the military was tasked to implement in Afghanistan. The detail and nuance of their actions are not determined predominantly by the government leader's decision (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 178). It is determined by the standard operating procedures of the involved organizations. McChrystal's assessment of the situation on the ground was from a military perspective, the Riedel review was of a military and intelligence perspective, and DoS provided reports that never officially claimed their stand on the issue of starting to negotiate towards peace. DoS was purely feeding the NSC with the information for which the NSC was asking.

This section has highlighted how government behavior according to Model II can be understood less as deliberate *choices* of leaders, and more as *outputs* of organizations functioning according to standard sequence of behavior (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). Model II attempts to identify the relevant organizational behavior from which action emerge. One of the key issues for these reviews, were the cooperation between departments. This cooperation should also be codified in procedures. Although the different agencies met in the Principals Committee, this thesis has not investigated what the cooperation looked like in the lower echelons of the organizations. This is an interesting topic to be researched further. Also, as Model II focuses solely on action as outputs from organizations, it fails to explain why the DoS had so little influence on the process. For this thesis, that topic is left for Model III to discuss.

5.3 Model III Governmental Politics Model

Model III looks at the bargaining process between multiple players with various interests and goals. It assesses the influence of the players, the differences in relative power and the bargaining between them, and how this leads to the *outcome* of the decision. Analyzing the Obama administration's decision process in light of model III highlights certain aspects that are of crucial importance. During the final review, there was already a friction between the military and civilian side. McChrystal's honest assessment on how many troops he needed put him in trouble, and some saw the leak as a ploy from the military to box in the president to approve more troops.

I think it was viewed by the political leadership in the White House as, maybe not the entire the military, but somebody in the DoD was trying to force their hand. Basically, push, force them into a decision to increase troops. I think the president rightfully was not gonna want to have his hands forced, but also felt that in order to responsively move forward in the phase of a public demand by commander in a war to increase troops at that level. (Singh, Paragraph 17)

This is supported by Lute:

Some of the civilian players in the interagency took that as an attempt by the military to take its case for more troop's public. In other words, I think the suggestion was, or I think the suspicion was, among some, not all. But among some senior civilians' leaders that this was a deliberate leak, it was intended to weight the process in the favor of the commander's assessment. That in effect had a, that eroded the trust among military and civilian officials and that trust deficit continued to flavor the policies on Afghanistan but maybe even more broadly for U.S. thereafter. (Lute, Paragraph 17)

It has become apparent during the interviews for this thesis that there were different "alliances" and preferences among the people involved in the decision-making process. While some of the sources have pointed this out explicitly, a clear indication on this has also come from listening to their arguments, and from the people they recommended being interviewed.

The findings do however suggest that there was a strong consensus among the principal players on the military and civilian side towards the surge and the increase of troop level. Secretary Gates, Secretary Clinton, Gen. Lute, and the military commanders were giving the

same message to the president. Their message was that a surge and increase of troops were key components to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaeda in order to stabilize Afghanistan. The only exception in opinion at this level was VP Biden.

At the same time, it is interesting to observe that Secretary Clinton, as head of DoS, also understood the value of engaging politically with the Taliban. She was a strong supporter of Holbrooke, his team, and their ideas to pursue a political settlement. Most of this work took place secretly, with only a few people inside the administration involved. President Obama was informed about their efforts, as was General Lute (Ambassador Kåre Aas, personal communication, June 13, 2020). Therefore, in the Principals Committee, this view was less prominent than her support to Gates. “The strongest supporter of the Pentagon on this was Secretary of State Clinton; she fully endorsed Bob Gates’ proposals; the biggest critics was the VP Biden who wanted a much smaller footprint” (Riedel, Paragraph 13).

Clinton was a former First Lady, a key figure in the democratic party, and as senator she served on the Committee on Armed Services between 2003 and 2009. She had a personal agenda in supporting the military: “She didn’t feel confident enough about this, and she did not want to be the person who took on the military, because she was going to be running for president in the future” (Rubin, Paragraph 22). The U.S. military is powerful and their support is important when campaigning for becoming the next president of the United States. Allison’s model suggests that each player pulls and hauls with power towards outcomes that will advance his or her conception of personal interests (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

So, one big part of the review was on what kind of diplomatic efforts could we make to persuade the Pakistanis to alter policy. That was basically assigned to Secretary Clinton, and she made a number of trips to Pakistan in the course of the next two or three years, and very little progress was made. Very little is probably even more than the truth - no progress was made on this issue. (Riedel, Paragraph 12)

A key issue that needs to be understood is why negotiations with the Taliban was not a central issue in the policy making. The sources from the DoS say that there was “not much room” to discuss these matters in the Principals Committee, because other course of actions was occupying the meeting agenda. Holbrooke’s team faced criticism and obstructions within the administration by Holbrooke being described as a “big dramatic character”, and was not a popular figure in the White House and with the president (Packer, 2019). Holbrooke and his

team were among the few in the NSC who championed negotiating with the Taliban to achieve peace. Because of Holbrooke's nature and lack of popularity among cabinet officials, the intelligence and military communities taking up more space, and Secretary Clinton supporting the DoD, it was hard for the rest of the team in the DoS to be heard.

“Holbrooke did not permit us to use the term political settlement because that was considered much too inflammatory, incendiary” (Rubin, Paragraph 22). It seems like Holbrooke read the opinions around the table at the Situation Room and understood that a political settlement would not be something implemented in the strategy. Secretary Clinton was “very hesitant about political settlement with the Taliban. I mean later she became more supportive” (Rubin, Paragraph 24). It also indicates that the Secretary of State supported the work Holbrooke and his team was doing, but not in the Principals Committee. Model III is not helpful in providing an answer to why, but it is still a question to raise why she did not do so.

At this time, there were several meetings where we gave her, briefed her and gave her, but she never brought them up. But of course, the way the meetings were run also, they didn't, like, ask her: What do you think, Secretary of State, our goal should be, what should we try to do - no! They would, you know, the National Security Advisor was Jim Jones, and he would just go to Petraeus in the meetings. And Petraeus would give one of his lengthy detailed filled briefings, and people would talk about troop numbers. So, people just kept talking about troop numbers and they never talked about Afghanistan as a country or a society or what it was capable of being, you know, as they still don't. (Rubin, Paragraph 24)

As one of the most trusted and senior advisors to the president, one can wonder both why Clinton's opinion in the room was not asked for, or for why she did not provide the assessments of her team.

[...] at different times we got along better or worse, again the period you are describing – the early period was one of the more difficult times in terms of the State - NSC relationship, because Ambassador Holbrooke and General Doug Lute, who was in charge of the NSC at the time, there was friction between them, and friction in general between Holbrooke and the White House. (Blanc, Paragraph 8)

General Lute was a crucial person in the process. He and his team had an advantage in that they controlled the flow of information that went all the way to the president's desk. He had

led the last assessment under President Bush, and he and Secretary Gates were experienced working both in and with the White House. Ambassador Holbrooke in the DoS did not have a strong bargaining advantage with the key players in the process. He was in dispute with Lute and some other members at the White House, including the president himself. This seems to put major constraints on the information flow up to the senior level.

What many of the respondents mentioned is that the decision-making process towards the final decision was somewhat troubling for Obama. General Petraeus mentioned that one of the most significant differences between the first and the second review was the president's involvement in the process (Petraeus, Paragraph 16). Obama took the issue very seriously, something which made him chair up to ten meetings at the NSC. The National Security Advisor usually leads those meetings, but the president was leading them himself, which is an uncommon practice for a president. This illustrates Obama's attitude and commitment towards the war and how seriously he took the issue. At the same time, having the president in the room would change the dynamics in the meeting, possibly limiting the ability for people to speak freely. The sources have explained that the president asked really good questions without getting satisfying answers in his Principals Committee. The findings have shown he was hesitant, thorough and very analytical throughout the decision-making processes. The research indicates that he felt he needed to follow the process closely for not making the same mistakes as his predecessor in Afghanistan. The advices he got were consensual, pointing in the same direction, and in a way indicates that he did not get the answers he was hoping to get from his closest advisors. President Obama was newly elected and among some viewed as being weak in foreign policy. It must be difficult for him to stand alone on an issue if his closest advisors recommend something else. One of the respondents also mentioned that they believe that the outcome of that strategic review would have been different if Obama was in a 2013-setting, grown more knowledgeable and confident in representing his own views.

The president - you know, was kind of hoping that somebody else would do it [advocate a political approach] so he could support it. But he didn't want to take responsibility for it, and he didn't have any experts in his entourage who were capable of really making a case for this. (Rubin, Paragraph 40)

I think the reason why he didn't get the answers is because it was extremely difficult questions and the answers didn't align with the policy direction that Secretary Gates

and Secretary Clinton had [...] that settled on pushing on for somewhat expanded military footprint. And so, I think it was inconvenient frankly. (Blanc, Paragraph 27)

During one of the last NSC meetings, when the final decision was coming into place, Holbrooke was asked about his opinion on the surge. He did not share his opinion on the subject.

Richard Holbrooke, he didn't say anything apparently in the last White House meeting, [...] and I think the president called him afterwards, and asked him, and he didn't say what he told us when he got back. Which is that he thought this surge was a terrible idea. (Singh, Paragraph 34)

Holbrooke opposed the decision of sending more civilian-military resources to Afghanistan, but also knew he was going against the tide at that stage. This example shows how the dynamics in the NSC limited at least one person have a saying in the forum. There may be many reasons why, but if most of the principals are supporting one direction, it is difficult for a single senior advisor to speak against them. Most of the sources mentioned that Gates was one of the president's key players in the decision-making process. He was a holdover from the previous administration, had high credibility and was perceived as an experienced politician.

5.3.1 Discussion

By applying Model III, we have been able to show how the opinions of the key principals were significant into shaping the outcome of the decision. This came about as a result of the unique mix of personalities pulling and hauling towards the outcome that they individually favored. However, it is not only the meetings in the NSC and the relationship between their members that shaped the final decision. If one takes a step back, and look at the process as a whole, one can see that *who* is asked to do a review or assessment is of critical importance. Their experience, network and opinions will influence the result they and their teams produce. While one must assume that they went to the task with the same good intentions, and wanted to make the most rational choice, the human dimension cannot be underestimated. Therefore, the network and contacts that Senator and President Obama had, and the choices he made when he directed certain people to do certain assessments, influenced the final outcome of the strategy. Assessing a model that is concerned with the human dimension, it is especially interesting that Secretary Clinton did not advocate more firmly for the solution that her staff

was working on. While this may be influenced by her personal ambitions, it is also hard to not overlook the fact that the NSC *was in agreement* that the counterinsurgency methodology was the right way to go.

6 CONCLUSION

This study has addressed President Obama's first year in office and his strategic reviews leading towards a decision to increase the American troop levels in Afghanistan. The study has sought to answer the research question "How and why did President Obama in 2009 decide to increase the U.S. civil-military deployment to Afghanistan?"

The study has shown that Obama continued on a strategy from President Bush. The strategy was renewed twice, first through Bruce Riedel's strategic review and then from a second strategic review run from the NSC. President Obama was forced into making quick decisions on Afghanistan in the beginning of his presidency. After the leak of General McChrystal's Afghanistan assessment, he again was pressured into making quick decisions towards the end of 2009. The result was a counterinsurgency strategy based on civilian-military cooperation that significantly increased the number of troops in Afghanistan, but simultaneously put a time limit for their engagement.

The study has explained the underlying rational, organizational and human factors that caused the strategy to end up like it did. It has done this by applying Graham T. Allison's conceptual models derived from the decision-making in the Cuban Missile Crisis to this case. The threat and available options that the Obama administration perceived justifies the choices they made. This does not mean that the choices they made were made with the right assumptions. These assumptions were driven from assessments made from organizations and individuals. While all may have operated out of their standard operating procedures, and all individuals may have had the best interests in mind, the research has shown how there was a clear footprint from the DoD and the intelligence community in the strategy's preparatory reviews and meetings. The DoS was included, but they were only a supporting actor. While the DoD was concentrating on the surge and how to defeat the threat represented by al-Qaeda and the Taliban, the DoS understood that the resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan had to be a political one. They wanted to engage in a political dialogue with the Taliban in order to achieve a sustainable peace that could stabilize the country, but didn't have sufficient support of such action among the people closest to Obama. The pressure to commit troops to Afghanistan, caused by the McChrystal leak, ensured that other options were not considered. As such, a political solution to the situation in Afghanistan was never seriously discussed in NSC meetings.

The purpose of this study has not been to validate Allison's conceptual models but rather to utilize his theory on the case to find out how this strategic decision came about. Allison's conceptual models provided a strong framework to detect the various aspects of the decision-making processes. The collected evidence in relation to the models highlights the individuals' role and involvement, the influential power the principal members of the NSC and the chairs of the strategy reviews had in impacting the final outcome of President Obama's decision. The political leaders in the NSC, the DoD, together with the U.S. military commanders, had significantly more influence on the decision than the DoS. A vital element was that Secretary Clinton and Secretary Gates were close in their assessments, advising President Obama towards a surge. The thesis has benefitted from having some of the key people around Obama as providers of information and details regarding Obama's decision to increase the troop level. Their contributions have increased the value of the analysis significantly. By studying their first-hand accounts of the process, it is clear that the individuals involved in decision-making are key to understanding the political result. This thesis suggests that it is the individuals involved, their characters, world-view, preferences and organizational backgrounds that is most important for political decisions. Acknowledging the importance of the interpersonal factor is a key takeaway for other organizations as well. Also, actors may think they make the most rational choice. A thing to remember is that the data which the assessment is based on may not be accurate. Whether one evaluates threats, opportunities or options, the most rational choice may not be rational if one knew the "true" data. This is of course an exercise that is easy to do in hindsight, but not in the moment when leadership and decision-making is required. A lesson learned is anyway to remember to revisit one's original assumptions to see if they have changed.

Allison's models have value, but the study has also underlined the paramount importance of the human aspect. This study might therefore be of limited direct relevance for other organizations and decision-making processes. Allison's models were based on a different situation, at a different time. As this research has shown the importance of individuals in the process, it may be hard to generalize and draw conclusive lessons between different decision-making processes. Nevertheless, understanding the human dimension, biases and common fallacies is of utmost importance, both for researchers and academics, but also for decision-makers.

An interesting observation on the process is that it was mainly executed by men. There was only one woman around the table in the situation room; all the sources of this study have been men; and most of the suggestions for further interviews were men (the only two women suggested were Michelle Flournoy and Laurel Miller). Most researchers on this subject are men, something which the bibliography of this thesis supports. In addition, the theories employed are mainly based on the perspective of men. Without criticizing them in any way for the valuable addition they provide to the academic discussion, it is important to note that the subject could have benefited from having more females providing their views on issues of national security and strategy. Gender dynamics are important in foreign policy and international security, and this decision-making process has lacked a female perspective (see Goldstein, 2003; Sjoberg, 2010).

In order to go in depth, most research elect to focus on just one perspective of the case. This research has elected to use three: the rational, the organizational, and the interpersonal aspect. While Allison's theory sheds light on many factors that might help explain the outcome of a decision-making process, it provides few accurate tools to prioritize these factors amongst themselves. This is particularly apparent when applying all three models to the same case. Hence, an interesting area for further research could involve attempts at developing a method of weighing the different factors against each other.

For the case itself, there are many areas this research has highlighted that deserves being studied in more depth. The restrictions in time and space of this study has limited its full potential. The following are areas that should be investigated further:

- What impact did the intelligence community have on President Obama's strategy?
- How rational was the U.S. view of the threat from al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan?
- What role, if any, did considerations of U.S. domestic policy concerns play in shaping the strategy?
- How do the lower echelons of the Department of Defense and Department of State cooperate on strategies of national security?

Think, too, of the great part that is played by the unpredictable in war: think of it now, before you are actually committed to war. The longer a war lasts, the more things tend to depend on accidents. Neither you nor we can see into them: we have to abide their outcome in the dark. And when people are entering upon a war they do things the wrong way round. Action comes first, and it is only when they have already suffered that they begin to think.

— Thucydides,
The Peloponnesian War

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8 APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Presentation of Sources

The reason these distinguished persons were interviewed are highlighted in bold.

Mr. Jarrett Blanc



Jarrett Blanc is a senior fellow in the Geoeconomics and Strategy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He was previously the deputy lead coordinator and State Department coordinator for Iran nuclear implementation at the U.S. Department of State under President Obama, responsible for the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran’s nuclear program.

Prior to this position, he was the principal deputy special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP) and acting SRAP. In this position, he played a key role in developing and implementing the international security assistance plan for Afghanistan, mediating the Afghan electoral process, leading efforts to spark an

Afghan-led peace process, securing the negotiated release of Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, and unwinding more than a decade of U.S. detention operations in Afghanistan and led the establishment of two multilateral bodies—the International Contact Group and the Istanbul Process. Blanc twice received the State Department’s Distinguished Honor Award and received the Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service, its highest civilian honor.

Before joining the State Department in 2009, Blanc spent many years working for international organizations and NGOs advising on conflict termination and political transitions. He managed the first elections in Iraq and other complex infrastructure and governance operations in conflict and post-conflict areas such as Afghanistan, Kosovo, the Palestinian Authority, Lebanon, and Nepal. Blanc has been a Council on Foreign Relations international affairs fellow, a visiting scholar at the U.S. Institute of Peace, a senior policy analyst at the Open Society Institute, and an adjunct professor at the University of Maryland and the George Washington University. Blanc has published a number of works and has lectured at Harvard, Princeton, West Point, Annapolis, and the Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna. Blanc holds an A.B. from Harvard University and an M.S. in Environmental Science and Policy from Johns Hopkins University.

Source: <https://carnegieendowment.org/experts/1343>

Ambassador Douglas Lute



Ambassador Douglas Lute is the former United States Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Council, NATO's standing political body. Appointed by President Obama, he assumed the Brussels-based post in 2013 and served until 2017. He received the State Department's Distinguished Honor Award.

A career Army officer, in 2010 Lute retired from active duty as a lieutenant general after 35 years of service. **In 2007 President Bush named him as Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor to coordinate the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2009 he was the senior White House official retained by President Obama and his focus on the National**

Security Council staff shifted to South Asia. Across these two Administrations, he served a total of six years in the White House.

Before being assigned to the White House, General Lute served as Director of Operations (J3) on the Joint Staff, overseeing U.S. military operations worldwide. From 2004 to 2006, he was Director of Operations for the United States Central Command, with responsibility for U.S. military operations in 25 countries across the Middle East, eastern Africa and Central Asia, in which over 200,000 U.S. troops operated.

In earlier assignments he served as Deputy Director of Operations for the United States European Command in Stuttgart, Germany; Assistant Division Commander in the 1st Infantry Division in Germany; Commander of U.S. Forces in Kosovo; and Commander of the Second Cavalry Regiment. Through his military career, he received numerous honors and awards, including three awards of the Defense Distinguished Service Medal.

General Lute holds degrees from the United States Military Academy at West Point and from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and a charter member of the Flag Officer Advisory Group of the United States Institute of Peace.

Source: <https://www.belfercenter.org/person/douglas-lute>

Ambassador Richard Olson



Ambassador Richard Olson retired from the U.S. Foreign Service in November of 2016 with the rank of career minister.

His final assignment was as U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP). From 2012 to 2015 he was the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan.

Olson served as the coordinating director for Development and Economic Affairs at U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan, from 2011 to 2012 and as U.S. Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates from 2008 to 2011.

Olson joined the U.S. Department of State in 1982. He served in Mexico, Uganda, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, the United Arab Emirates (both Abu Dhabi and Dubai), and Najaf, Iraq. He was also deputy chief of mission at the United States Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). His Washington assignments included: State Department Operations Center (twice), NATO Desk, the Office of Israel and Palestinian Affairs (twice, including as Director), and the Office of Iraqi Affairs, including as Director.

Olson is a recipient of the Secretary of State's Distinguished Service Award, a Presidential Distinguished Service Award, the Secretary of State's Award for Public Outreach, the State Department's Superior Honor Award (three times), and the Secretary of Defense's Exceptional Civilian Service Award (for his service in Iraq). He was awarded the medal of Wazir Akbar Khan by President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani.

He graduated from Brown University in 1981, receiving an A.B. in law and society (Honors) and history.

Source: <https://www.usip.org/people/richard-olson>

General David Petraeus



General (Ret) David H. Petraeus is currently a partner in Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co (KKR). Prior to joining KKR, Gen. Petraeus served over 37 years in the U.S. military, culminating his career with six consecutive commands, five of which were in combat, **including command of coalition forces during the Surge in Iraq, command of U.S. Central Command, and command of coalition forces in Afghanistan.** Following his service in the military, Gen. Petraeus served as the Director of the CIA during a period of significant achievements in the global war on terror.

Gen. Petraeus graduated with distinction from the U.S. Military Academy and subsequently earned a Ph.D. in an interdisciplinary program of international relations and economics from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. He subsequently taught both subjects at the U.S. Military Academy and later completed a fellowship at Georgetown University. He has also served for 3-1/2 years as a Visiting Professor of Public Policy at CUNY's Macaulay Honors College and he was for 6 years a Judge Widney Professor at the University of Southern California and a Senior Fellow at Harvard University.

Petraeus is also a Visiting Fellow at Yale's Jackson Institute, an Honorary Professor of the University of Birmingham (England), a member of the Trilateral Commission, Senior Vice-President of the Royal United Services Institute, and Co-Chairman of the Global Advisory Council of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, as well as a member of the boards of the Institute for the Study of War and the Atlantic Council and over a dozen veterans service organizations.

Gen. Petraeus has received numerous U.S. military, State Department, NATO, and United Nations medals and awards, including four Defense Distinguished Service Medals, the Bronze Star Medal for Valor, the Combat Action Badge, the Ranger tab, and master parachutist wings, and he has been decorated by 13 foreign countries. Over the past 15 years, General Petraeus has also been named a runner-up for Time magazine's Person of the Year, the Daily Telegraph man of the year, a Time 100 selectee, and for three years one of Foreign Policy magazine's top 100 public intellectuals.

Source: <https://www.kkr.com/our-firm/leadership/david-h-petraeus>

Mr. Bruce Riedel



Bruce Riedel is a senior fellow and director of the Brookings Intelligence Project. In addition, Riedel serves as a senior fellow in the Brookings Center for Middle East Policy. He retired in 2006 after 30 years of service at the Central Intelligence Agency, including postings overseas. **He was a senior advisor on South Asia and the Middle East to the last four presidents of the United States in the staff of the National Security Council at the White House.** He was also deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Near East and South Asia at the Pentagon and a senior advisor at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Brussels. Riedel was a

member of President Bill Clinton's peace process team and negotiated at Camp David and other Arab-Israeli summits and he organized Clinton's trip to India in 2000. **In January 2009, President Barack Obama asked him to chair a review of American policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan, the results of which the president announced in a speech on March 27, 2009.**

Riedel is the author of *The Search for al Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology and Future* (2008), *Deadly Embrace: Pakistan, America and the Future of the Global Jihad* (2011), *Avoiding Armageddon: America, India and Pakistan to the Brink and Back* (2013), *JFK's Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, the CIA and the Sino-Indian War* (2015), and *Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States since FDR* (2017). He is a contributor to *Which Path to Persia? Options for a New American Strategy Toward Iran* (2009), *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East* (2011) and *Becoming Enemies: U.S.-Iran Relations and the Iran-Iraq War, 1979-1988* (2012). His book *What We Won: America's Secret War in Afghanistan, 1979-1989* (2014) won the gold medal for best new book on war and military affairs at the INDIEFAB awards. His new book is *Beirut 1958 How America's Wars in the Middle East Began* (2019).

Riedel is a graduate of Brown (B.A.), Harvard (M.A.), and the Royal College of Defense Studies in London. He has taught at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and Johns Hopkins University's School for Advanced International Studies, and he has been a guest lecturer at Dartmouth, Harvard, Brown, and other universities. Riedel is a recipient of the Intelligence Medal of Merit and the Distinguished Intelligence Career Medal.

Source: <https://www.brookings.edu/experts/bruce-riedel/>

Dr. Barnett R. Rubin



Dr. Barnett R. Rubin is a Senior Fellow and Associate Director of Center on International Cooperation (CIC), where he directs the Afghanistan Pakistan Regional Program. He has worked at CIC since July 2000. During 1994-2000 he was Director of the Center for Preventive Action, and Director, Peace and Conflict Studies, at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. Rubin was Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for the Study of Central Asia at Columbia University from 1990 to 1996. Previously, he was a Jennings Randolph Peace Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace and Assistant Professor of Political Science at Yale University.

From April 2009 until October 2013, Dr. Rubin was the Senior Adviser to the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan in the U.S. Department of State. In November-December 2001 Rubin served as special advisor to the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Afghanistan, during the negotiations that produced the Bonn Agreement. **He subsequently advised the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan on the drafting of the constitution of Afghanistan, the Afghanistan Compact, and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.** Dr. Rubin received a Ph.D. (1982) and M.A. (1976) from the University of Chicago and a B.A. (1972) from Yale University. He also received a Fulbright Fellowship to study at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris in 1977-1978. He is founder and chair of the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum (a program of the Social Science Research Council). He was a founding member of the Executive Board of Asia Watch, now Human Rights Watch/Asia. During 1996-98 he served on the Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad. Rubin conceived the idea of developing production of essential oils in Afghanistan, and founded the Gulestan Ariana LLC in Jalalabad.

Dr. Rubin is the author of numerous works like *Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror* (2013), *Blood on the Doorstep: the Politics of Preventing Violent Conflict* (2002). He is also the author of *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (2002), *Calming the Ferghana Valley: Development and Dialogue in the Heart of Central Asia* (1999), *Stabilizing Nigeria: Sanctions, Incentives, and Support for Civil Society* (1998); *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State Building* (1998); *Cases and Strategies for Preventive Action* (1998); *Toward Comprehensive Peace in Southeast Europe: Conflict Prevention in the South Balkans* (1996), and *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan: From Buffer State to Failed State* (1995).

Source: <https://cic.nyu.edu/people/barnett-rubin>

Mr. Vikram Singh



Vikram J. Singh is senior advisor to the Asia Program at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). Singh has been a leader of innovation in public policy and global affairs at the U.S. Department of Defense, Department of State, and major non-profits. He advises USIP on all aspects of peace and stability in Asia including Afghanistan and Pakistan, Myanmar, China’s role in the region, and North Korea.

From 2014 to 2017 Singh was vice president for national security and international policy at the Center for American Progress, where he established CAP’s Asia program and launched work on nuclear security, a major task force on U.S – India relations, and a program on defending the internet as a force for democracy.

As deputy assistant secretary of Defense for South and Southeast Asia from 2012 to 2014, Singh ran negotiations to deepen U.S. defense cooperation in the region including through new access agreements with Australia, the Philippines, and Singapore. **Singh was Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan at the Department of State until 2011. He developed a political-military strategy for reconciliation efforts to end the war.** He represented the United States with China, India, Russia, Middle Eastern partners, the U.N., and NATO members on political, military and economic issues related to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Singh was the first defense fellow at the Center for a New American Security in 2007. He was previously the Pentagon’s first director for partnership strategy, developing and securing passage by Congress of new legal authorities for global defense cooperation. As a Presidential Management Fellow, Singh also served at U.S. Mission to the United Nations and chaired the DoD missile technology working group for the “Next Steps in the Strategic Partnership” with India. Singh received the Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Civilian Service in 2012 and the Department of State Superior Honor Award in 2006 and 2012. He is a Fellow of Columbia University and a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley and Columbia University.

Source: <https://www.usip.org/people/vikram-j-singh>

Dr. Andrew Wilder



Andrew Wilder is the vice president of Asia programs in the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). He joined USIP in August 2010 as the director of Afghanistan and Pakistan Programs. Prior to joining the Institute, he served as research director for politics and policy at the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University. Previously, Wilder served as founder and director of Afghanistan's first independent policy research institution, the Kabul-based Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU). This was preceded by more than 10 years managing humanitarian and development programs in Pakistan and Afghanistan, including with Save the Children, International Rescue Committee, and Mercy

Corps International.

Wilder is the author of *The Pakistani Voter: Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in the Punjab* (Oxford University Press, 1999), and has written numerous other publications. **He has conducted extensive research exploring issues relating to state-building, development and stabilization efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Recent research has focused on electoral politics in Afghanistan, and the effectiveness of aid in promoting stabilization objectives in Afghanistan and Pakistan.**

Wilder holds a bachelor's degree in foreign service from Georgetown University. He also holds a master's degree in law and diplomacy and a doctorate from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

Source: <https://www.usip.org/people/andrew-wilder>

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

“How and why did President Obama in 2009 decide to increase the U.S. civil-military deployment to Afghanistan?”

Introduction of the researcher and the research project

- Present yourself by name and your role as researcher and connection to the University of Oslo.
- Briefly describe the research case and research question. Mention the theory: Graham Allison’s Conceptual Models (Essence of Decision) to understand the outcome of the President’s final decision (Strategic Review (AF-PAK Strategy) and Final Orders).
- Describe the purpose and format (semi-structured) of the interview: connect with sources that has been close to the decision-making process in the Obama administration. Research question.
- The questions asked are based on the conceptual models in a semi-structured fashion.

Mandatory information

- Confidentiality; agreeing on use of personal information in the research; name, role, direct quote may be used in this research. Sign the consent form.
- Inform the respondents about their right to not answer all questions, and to withdraw their consent at any time. All gathered data containing their information will be deleted.
- Agreeing on the interview being recorded with sound and image. I will use the function on Skype to record the interview.
- Transcripts of the interview will be made available if requested.

The Respondents Role and Affiliation

- Please state your name and the role you have as of today. And what was your job in 08-09?
- What was your role and what department did you work for during President Obama’s first term?

The National Security Council

- Can you describe the National Security Council during the Obama Administration – especially with regards to the Afghanistan War?
- Please give your assessment on the interagency process within NSC, State department, Pentagon, CIA and the U.S. embassy in Kabul in regards to Afghanistan.
- How did President Obama consider the various options he got regarding the US force level in Afghanistan?
- How important was the Principals Committee in the NSC?
- How often did the Principals Committee meet and who were the regular attendees?
- How often did the NSC have meetings regarding Afghanistan towards the Final Order?

Interagency Policy Group: Strategic Review AF-PAK

- Can you describe the formation of the Interagency Policy group and the role it had?
- In your opinion why did the President initiate the process of Strategic Review?
- What was its main objective and purpose?
- In your view, what was the value of the Strategic Review process and the final Strategy?
- What were the challenges or obstacles in the development of the AF-PAK Strategy?
- In your opinion, who did support or oppose the outcome of AF-PAK Strategy?

President Obama's Final Order

- What parts of the Strategic Review was incorporated in the developing process of the Final Order?
- To what extent did the President rely on information from other actors/agencies during the development of the Final Order? Inputs from other agencies?
- What factors shaped each player's perceptions on the preferred course of action?
- From your point of view, what were the challenges or obstacles in the development of the Final Order?
- Based on the conceived options that, what threats and opportunities did the President see in regards to the final decision?
- Was there any strategic costs and benefits for the different options?
- In your opinion, what was the President's choice given these conditions?

- What was the main objective behind President Obama's decision, and was the objective understood and endorsed by the Principals?
- In your opinion, who was the key actors and how did they influence the President's decision?

Backup Questions

- Were there actors that wished to also be involved? And were there certain actors that was left outside of the collaboration?
- What organizations was a part of the decision-making process? Who got included in the process and who should be more included? Was it the President's decision to include or exclude actors?
- Was there internal interest in the different organizations that led them to choose a certain path when suggesting options to the President?
- What capabilities and constrains did your organizations' existing SOPs create in producing information about international conditions, threats and opportunities.
- How much did President Karzai's government influence President Obama's decision-making process in Washington D.C.?
- In your opinion what would you say was the main driver for President Obamas decision to increase troops in Afghanistan?

Closing Remarks

- Is there anything you would like to add or have we missed something you think is important to mention?
- Thank the respondent of taking time of their busy schedule and partake in this research.
- Apply snowball-method for recruitment of new respondents.
- Permission to reach out if any questions?

Appendix 3: Consent Form

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM & PROJECT INFORMATION

I have received and understood information about the research project and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent on the information below:

- I agree on that my personal information and quotes may be published after completion of the research. Personal information might include: name, position, role and organizational affiliation during the timeframe being studied.

- I wish to remain anonymous in this research project. I may be quoted, but no identifiable information will be published.

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, June 22, 2020.

This is an inquiry about your participation in a research project for the fulfillment of my Master’s degree at the University of Oslo. In this letter I will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

The purpose of this research project is to understand the strategic decision-making process that led President Obama to increase the military deployment to Afghanistan after the elections in 2008. The thesis will adopt Graham Allison’s conceptual models in order to understand how and why the outcome of the final became a reality. The research question is:

“How and why did President Obama in 2009 decide to increase the U.S. civil-military deployment to Afghanistan?”

Why are you being asked to participate?

You have been identified and selected as an important source to this project because of the role you had during the Obama administration. Your expertise and level of knowledge on the Afghanistan War and the Obama administration is considered valuable and important in this regard. You are a person of interest for this thesis and I hereby ask you to participate in this research project.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The University of Oslo is the responsible institution of this project. This research and is a part of Sanaa Bhatti Vika's Master thesis. She can be reached at: sanaav@student.sv.uio.no.

Research supervisor Professor Lars Klemsdal can also be contacted at

lars.klemsdal@sosgeo.uio.no.

What does participation involve for you?

If you choose to participate in the project, I will conduct an in-depth interview with you lasting approximately one hour. The interview will be conducted using video conferencing software.

With your consent, the interview will be recorded electronically. After the project is complete, these recordings will be deleted.

The interview includes questions about the options, choices, organizations and the actual occurrences that affected the President's action. The intent is to understand *how* the decision was made, and it is of particular interest to get unique information from you on the process that is not otherwise available.

Participation in this project is of course voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason.

Your personal privacy – how I will store and use your personal data

I will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. I will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). I will be the only person with direct access to the recording of the interview.

Your personal information and quotes may be included in the final thesis if you have accepted so in the form above.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end June 22, 2020. At this date, the digital recordings from the interview will be deleted. If you agree, transcriptions of the interviews may be kept for follow-up studies.

Your rights

As long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- Access the personal data that is being processed about you
- Request that your personal data is deleted

- Request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- Receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- Send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives me the right to process your personal data?

I will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with University of Oslo, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Norwegian Center for Research Data has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can you find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, you can contact:

University of Oslo via Lars Klemsdal: lars.klemsdal@sosgeo.uio.no

Data Protection Officer: Maren Magnus Voll: personvernombud@uio.no.

The Norwegian Centre for Research Data: personverntjenester@nsd.no or +47 5558 2117.

Yours sincerely,

Sanaa Bhatti Vika

Student, University of Oslo

+1 (202) 262-7393

sanaav@student.sv.uio.no

Appendix 4: NSD Approval

15.5.2020

Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger

NSD NORSK SENTER FOR FORSKNINGSDATA

NSD sin vurdering

Prosjekttittel

Obama's decision-making process - Master thesis

Referansenummer

969197

Registrert

24.02.2020 av Sanaa Bhatti Vika - sanaav@uio.no

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Universitetet i Oslo / Det samfunnsvitenskapelige fakultet / Institutt for sosiologi og samfunnsgeografi

Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)

Lars Klemsdal, lars.klemsdal@sosgeo.uio.no, tlf: 4722857089

Type prosjekt

Studentprosjekt, masterstudium

Kontaktinformasjon, student

Sanaa Bhatti Vika , sanaa.bhatti.vika@gmail.com, tlf: 12022627393

Prosjektperiode

19.02.2020 - 21.06.2020

Status

24.04.2020 - Vurdert

Vurdering (1)

24.04.2020 - Vurdert

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg den 24.4.2020, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.