

The counterterrorism policy of the United States in Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks

Abstract. This article is focused on the United States counterterrorism policy in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks and presents a critical analysis of the strategies of the Bush and the Obama administrations as well as the prospects for the new strategy offered by Donald Trump. The US approach to its counterterrorism policy in Afghanistan is changeable and constitutes a complex process which takes place depending on the ruling presidential administration. As a result of the change of the administration, President Bush's strategy, which was predominantly based on using force and taking military action, was followed by that of President Obama's, who perceived terrorism as a rather complicated phenomenon requiring complex and diverse solutions, and included not only counterterrorism but also nation-building and democracy promotion. As for Afghanistan, after facing the 9/11 attacks in New York and experiencing the new form of terrorism, the country was and continues to be a region in the world where the United States has been getting experience in responding to this new, constantly evaluating form of terrorism.

Keywords: *Afghanistan, United States, terrorism, counterterrorism, nation-building, Bush administration, Obama administration*

Polityka antyterrorystyczna Stanów Zjednoczonych w Afganistanie po zamachach z 11 września

Streszczenie. Rozdział koncentruje się na polityce antyterrorystycznej Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki w Afganistanie po zamachach z 11 września 2001 r. i przedstawia krytyczną analizę strategii administracji Busha i Obamy, a także perspektywy nowej strategii zaproponowanej przez Donalda Trumpa. Amerykańskie podejście do polityki antyterrorystycznej w Afganistanie jest zmienne i stanowi złożony proces zależny od rządzącej administracji prezydenckiej. W wyniku zmiany administracji, strategia prezydenta Busha, która opierała się głównie na użyciu siły i podejmowaniu działań wojennych, została zastąpiona przez strategię prezydenta Obamy, który postrzegał terroryzm jako dość skomplikowane zjawisko wymagające złożonych i różnorodnych rozwiązań, a jego strategia obejmowała nie tylko antyterroryzm, ale także budowanie państwa i promocję demokracji. Jeśli chodzi o Afganistan, po atakach z 11 września w Nowym Jorku i po zetknięciu się z nową formą terroryzmu, kraj ten był i nadal jest regionem świata, w którym Stany Zjednoczone Ameryki zdobywają doświadczenie w reagowaniu na tę nową, stale ewoluującą formę terroryzmu.

Słowa kluczowe: *Afganistan, Stany Zjednoczone Ameryki, terroryzm, antyterroryzm, budowanie państwa, administracja Busha, administracja Obamy*

Introduction

The US-led military campaign in Afghanistan supported by the Northern Alliance was launched after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States.

Before the attacks Afghanistan was not considered to be a high priority for the US. After helping the Afghan mujahideen in the war with the Soviet Union in the 1980s, the United States “disengaged from the country” in the 1990s leaving it to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia¹. In 1996, the Taliban, a militant Afghan Islamist group, seized control over Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, and established a repressive theocratic regime there, in response to which the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, supported by Iran, Russia, and India, started a war against the Taliban².

It should be noted that the population of Afghanistan is divided into several major ethnic groups with Pashtuns (the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan) constituting the majority mainly in the south and east of the country, Tajiks - in the northeast and west, Hazaras - in the centre, and Uzbeks - in the northwest³. Thus, the Taliban dominated by Pashtuns and the Northern Alliance dominated by Tajiks, Uzbeks and other small minorities were opposed in this war “largely along ethnic lines”⁴. In the late 1990s al-Qaeda network started to focus its activities in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, even then the United States refused to support the Northern Alliance, and, as mentioned above, it was only after the 9/11 attacks that the Bush administration decided to overthrow the Taliban.

Today the situation in Afghanistan is still not stable. As M.A. Cohen observes, by the end of the decade the war in Afghanistan had “devolved into a quagmire” for American troops and a “potential disaster” for the Afghans, and all the decisions that had been made by Western policymakers and Afghan leaders had been the wrong ones⁵. There were, of course, other opinions about the progress in Afghanistan. According to P. Bergen, for example, the situation was not so hopeless, and in a 2010 poll 6 out of 10 Afghans declared that their country was on the right road⁶. Nevertheless, the war has not ended yet, and decisive steps are needed to resolve the conflict in the country.

¹ W. Ra’ees, *Can Afghanistan Be Rescued?*, “Middle East Quarterly” 2012, 19 (2), pp. 51-60.

² Ibidem.

³ T. Barfield, *Afghanistan’s Ethnic Puzzle*, “Foreign Affairs” 2011, 90 (5), pp. 54-65.

⁴ W. Ra’ees, *op. cit.*

⁵ M.A. Cohen, *Afghanistan: What Can We Achieve?*, “Dissent” 2011 (winter issue), pp. 9-13.

⁶ P. Bergen, *Why Afghanistan Is far from Hopeless*, “Time” 2011, 177 (12), pp. 50-51.

The Freedom Agenda and the counterterrorism strategy of the Bush administration in Afghanistan

Some scholars argue that any discussion about failure or success of the mission in Afghanistan should take into account the political, economic and security situation prevailing in the country before the American intervention in 2001, and, as mentioned earlier, this situation was really critical. In January 2001 Afghanistan was ranked by the Economist the world's "worst country". As P. Miller observes, the security situation was "anarchic" and "chaotic" with no professional army or police force, the Northern Alliance militiamen fighting against the Taliban and al-Qaeda were "a poorly managed, largely unaccountable force deployed across the country", whilst warlords were waging mini wars against one another⁷. What is more, the drug production and trade was also expanding in the country. The social and economic situation in Afghanistan in 2001 was not very good either. Afghans were the world's seventh poorest people and lived on about 48 cents per day⁸. There was no national currency, the country's infrastructure was very poor (only one-fifth of Afghans, for instance, had access to clean water), and the educational system was inefficient (only a third of the population could read or write)⁹.

The military campaign in Afghanistan was initially based on a counterterrorism strategy. The United States launched its Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan on 7 October 2001, which was the first major initiative of the G.W. Bush administration's "War on Terror" after the 9/11 terrorist attacks¹⁰. The operation was joined by the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. The goal of the OEF was "to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations, and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime"¹¹. The Taliban regime was soon defeated, and in May 2002, after the "Operation Anaconda" conducted against al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters in the Shah-I-Kot Valley, the "major combat" was declared to be over¹². After the fall of the Taliban, the United Nations, with the help of the United States,

⁷ P.D. Miller, *Finish the job*, "Foreign Affairs" 2001, 90 (1), pp. 51-65.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ O. Hassan, A. Hammond, *The Rise and Fall of American's Freedom Agenda in Afghanistan: Counterterrorism, Nation-building and Democracy*, "The International Journal of Human Rights" 2001, 15 (4), pp. 532-551.

¹¹ O. Hassan, A. Hammond, *op. cit.*

¹² R. Indurthy, *The Obama Administration's Strategy in Afghanistan*, "International Journal on World Peace" 2001, 28 (3), pp. 7-52.

organized a conference in Bonn, Germany, where an agreement forming an interim administration headed by Hamid Karzai, an anti-Taliban leader, was signed¹³. This agreement served as “a road map for establishing and legitimizing a new Afghan government” and also provided for the formation of an international peacekeeping force in Afghanistan¹⁴. Thus, in December 2001, the UN formed the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to help the new Afghan government maintain security in the country, and in August 2003 the ISAF came under NATO command led by the United States¹⁵. Later, in 2002, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was created “to coordinate the international community’s support operations and for political and economic reconstruction of the country”¹⁶.

As part of the Bonn process, a new Afghan constitution was drafted in 2003 and adopted in 2004 by the Constitutional Loya Jirga (grand council of elders), which was followed by presidential elections where Karzai was elected President¹⁷. It should be noted that the Afghan constitution is considered to be one of the most progressive constitutions in Central Asia or the Middle East and, as Miller argues, presents “an unmitigated improvement over Taliban lawlessness”¹⁸. In spite of the fact that the constitution is based on the traditional principles of Islamic legitimacy, it contains provisions on equal rights for men and women, the right to vote and individual liberty.

As pointed out above, the Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan was focused from the very beginning on regime change and counterterrorism, and not on democracy promotion or nation-building. The Bush administration wanted to keep a low military presence in Afghanistan and leave the country after achieving its military goals¹⁹. Therefore, the United States limited itself to counterterrorism and humanitarian assistance operations, whilst other reconstruction operations were to be performed by other coalition allies. For example, the US took responsibility to form a New Afghan National Army (ANA), and Germany was to build police, Japan – to carry out demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of militia forces, the UK – to be in charge of counter-narcotics, and Italy – to establish a justice

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 9.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ P.D. Miller, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ O. Hassan, A. Hammond, *op. cit.*

system²⁰. Between 2001 and 2005 the US and Afghan forces continued their “mopping-up” military operations in the southern and eastern provinces aimed against the remaining Taliban fighters and other insurgents²¹. Moreover, the reconstruction operations carried out in Afghanistan as well as the international financial aid contributed to improvements in such areas as education, health, and infrastructure. A total of \$18.4 billion was invested between 2001 and 2009 in rebuilding the country²². For example, the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank, the Treasury, and the Customs Department were rebuilt, and a new currency was launched. By the end of 2008 eighty percent of the population had access to basic health services compared to eight percent in 2001, school enrollment increased significantly (from 1.1 million students in 2001 to 5.7 million students in 2008), and the infrastructure improved noticeably (1,600 miles of new roads built, wider access to sanitation – increase from 12 percent to about 45 percent, access to telecommunications including cell-phones)²³.

Nevertheless, the Bush administration’s goals to stabilize Afghanistan were not achieved. According to W. Ra’ees, the operation was under-resourced from the beginning.²⁴ Despite the training and deployment of Afghan forces, the Taliban militants started to regain power by the end of 2005, especially in the Pashtun-dominated south and east parts²⁵. They started to commit suicide bombings and place explosive devices on roads causing destruction and killing the NATO forces and Afghan civilians. According to R. Indurthy, the situation was partly the result of President Bush’s decision to invade Iraq in 2003, which turned out to be an extremely “costly endeavor”, and instead of fighting in Afghanistan the Taliban and al-Qaeda, who were responsible for the 9/11 terrorist attacks, “the administration missed an opportunity to end the threat of the insurgents, and establish a stable regime in Afghanistan, if not a democracy”²⁶. The Bush administration diverted its intelligence and reconstruction resources such as elite CIA teams and Special Forces units and new Predator planes were shipped to Iraq²⁷.

²⁰ R. Indurthy, op. cit.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² P.D. Miller, op. cit.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ W. Ra’ees, op. cit.

²⁵ R. Indurthy, op. cit.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ R. Indurthy, op. cit.

According to Miller, the Taliban were able to “regroup and launch an insurgency” because nothing prevented them from doing that²⁸. The Afghan government was still too weak to provide dispute resolutions or offer services, and there was not enough international military force to maintain security in the country. It is also worth mentioning the fact that the Bush administration, regardless of the Bonn process installing Karzai into power, cooperated with and funded the so-called warlords in Afghanistan. They were useful for the US in their fight against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. There were reports, for instance, that in 2002 the US provided satellite communication equipment and \$200,000 to each of seven Afghan warlords and paid 35 warlords a total of \$7 million for their loyalty²⁹. As Hassan & Hammond argue, “US funding and joint operations legitimised and strengthened these regional powers over those of the central government” and divided Afghanistan into many states presented by warlords³⁰. David Rohidi and David Sanger of the *New York Times* point out that there is a number of failures that prevented the Bush administration from achieving its goals in Afghanistan: (1) an unfulfilled promise, (2) a shift of resources to Iraq, (3) a piecemeal operation, (4) failure to obtain President Gen. Pervaz Musharraf of Pakistan’s cooperation against the Taliban insurgents who were given a sanctuary in the country’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), (5) the divisions over strategy between the administration and the NATO countries, and (6) failure to build a consensus.³¹

As far as the fourth reason is concerned, the FATA poses a serious security threat because its members – foreign and Pakistani extremists – operate across the Afghan-Pakistan border and engage in drug trafficking in order to fund their terrorist activities. It should be noted that the Bush administration started to review its strategy in Afghanistan by the end of 2003, and the Afghanistan campaign began to be perceived not only in terms of counterterrorism but also democracy promotion. In accordance with its ‘Freedom Agenda’, the United States declared that it “would seek to promote democracy throughout the world, as the domestic character of other states was perceived to be of vital importance to the attainment of American interests”³². The democratic stability in Afghanistan was seen as vital to American national interests because it would also lead to stability in the

²⁸ P.D. Miller, op. cit.

²⁹ O. Hassan, A. Hammond, op. cit.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ R. Indurthy, op. cit., p. 12.

³² O. Hassan, A. Hammond, op. cit., p. 539.

neighbouring states of Iran and Pakistan. However, as mentioned above, this strategic goal was never achieved as the resources were diverted to Iraq. Although the war in Afghanistan has lasted longer than in Iraq and taking into consideration the fact that it's a bigger country with a larger population, over the years 2002-2009 Afghanistan received over ten billion dollars less in US assistance and fewer US troops were sent to Afghanistan than to Iraq (in 2009 - 50,700 "boots on the ground" in Afghanistan compared to 135,600 in Iraq)³³. What is more, the Bush administration failed to appreciate the fact that the Taliban was regaining its power in the neighbouring Pakistan where it was able to recruit Pashtun tribesmen and cooperate with al-Qaeda³⁴. As a result, by the end of 2009, the Taliban had created "shadow governments" across the country where officials collected taxes, conscripted young men into the Taliban army and held trials to punish criminals³⁵.

The US strategy in Afghanistan during the Obama administration

When President Barack Obama came into office in January 2009, his administration had to deal with all the "burden of responsibility" that was left by the Bush administration, and, therefore, a new strategy for Afghanistan had to be launched³⁶. Its goal was to restore political stability in the country and withdraw the US/NATO troops. Thus, in March 2009, Obama announced a new 'Af-Pak' policy aimed at defeating al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and preventing their return to these countries in the future³⁷. According to Ra'ees, the new policy represented a counterinsurgency strategy and viewed nation-building and democratization as vital to military success. Obama also obliged the government to co-operate more closely with international institutions, US allies and Afghanistan's neighbours. It is worth emphasizing here that from the beginning of his presidential candidacy Obama supported the war in Afghanistan at the same time being critical of the war in Iraq. He called the war in Afghanistan "a war of necessity" because al-Qaeda terrorists who had committed the 9/11 attacks were protected by the Taliban regime, whilst the war in Iraq was "a war of choice" and, in addition, "a failed policy"³⁸. Realizing that Afghanistan lacked sufficient resources and military force, Obama increased significantly the

³³ O. Hassan, A. Hammond, op. cit.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ W. Ra'ees, op. cit.

³⁶ R. Indurthy, op. cit., p. 12.

³⁷ W. Ra'ees, op. cit.

³⁸ R. Indurthy, op. cit.

number of US troops in Afghanistan as well as military and economic aid. Thus, in February 2009 he ordered 17,000 more troops to Afghanistan, in March 2009 - 4,000 additional troops to help train the Afghan security forces, and by the beginning of 2011 Americans constituted two-thirds of the ISAF troops out of 150,000.³⁹ As Obama argued in December 2009, his policy was focused on three key elements: a civilian surge, an effective partnership with Pakistan, and an enhanced "military effort to create the conditions for a transition"⁴⁰. Obama also obliged the US government to begin withdrawing troops from Afghanistan in July 2011 and end the operation in 2014 by completely handing over security tasks to Afghan military and police forces⁴¹.

In May 2011, when al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was discovered and killed by Americans in a compound on the outskirts of Abbottabad in Pakistan, close to the Pakistan Military Academy, many experts and politicians called for a faster withdrawal of the American troops from Afghanistan. They argued that the mission was over and that it was too expensive to maintain American presence in Afghanistan "amidst an era of mounting debt and budget fights"⁴². However, there were also reverse opinions and some experts argued that withdrawing troops would spoil a ten-year military effort and would cause Afghanistan "to reemerge as a destabilizing pariah that violates human rights and supports terrorist groups which threaten international security"⁴³. What is more, after the targeted killing of bin Laden it became clear that the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence service (ISI) was maintaining links with al-Qaeda and other extremist groups. Some ISI members, for example, provided weapons and ammunition to the Taliban, helped train Taliban insurgents and supplied financial assistance to their training camps⁴⁴.

Abshire & Browne state that the current US military-centric strategy in Afghanistan "suffers from a debilitating credibility deficit"⁴⁵. According to them, an accelerated withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan would be "tremendously ill-advised", and they emphasize that "a complementary long-term, coordinated regional economic and entrepreneurial development

³⁹ W. Ra'ees, op. cit.

⁴⁰ O. Hassan, A. Hammond, op. cit.

⁴¹ W. Ra'ees, op. cit.

⁴² D.M. Abshire, R. Browne, *The Missing Endgame for Afghanistan: A Sustainable Post-bin Laden Strategy*, "The Washington Quarterly" 2011, 34 (4), pp. 59-72.

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 60.

⁴⁴ S.G. Jones, *The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad*, "International Security" 2008, 32 (4), pp. 7-40.

⁴⁵ D.M. Abshire, R. Browne, op. cit.

program” is necessary to achieve the desired military goals and ensure long-term stability in the country⁴⁶. A greater emphasis should be put on the issues connected with regional dynamics and promotion of economic development. As Abshire & Browne put it, the current strategy lacks an “endgame” for today’s conflict in Afghanistan as compared to post-war plans the United States used to produce in the past, for example, for post-World War II Western Europe and Japan⁴⁷. Those post-war plans helped to provide long-term stability in both regions. Therefore, Afghanistan needs to be treated similarly and be assured that a long-term US and international support “will provide a better future based on economic opportunity, access to jobs, and regional peace and stability”⁴⁸.

It is worth mentioning that during his visit to Afghanistan on 1 May 2012, on the anniversary of Osama bin Laden's death, President Obama signed an agreement with Afghan President Hamid Karzai “to cover the decade after the planned final withdrawal of U.S. combat troops in 2014”⁴⁹. According to this agreement, American forces will continue counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan and help to train the Afghan military, but, as Obama stated, they will not build permanent bases, nor will they be patrolling the cities and mountains in Afghanistan⁵⁰. In his speech Obama announced that “after years of sacrifice the U.S. combat role in Afghanistan is winding down just as it has already ended in Iraq” and that now they “can see the light of a new day” because they are very close to achieving their goal which is to destroy al-Qaeda⁵¹. “With this agreement I am confident that the Afghan people will understand that the United States will stand by them”, Obama also said⁵².

In December 2014 America’s combat mission in Afghanistan came to an end. There remained less than 10,000 troops compared to the initial number of 100,000, and whilst the mission was first focused on leading the fight, the US forces were now mainly concentrated on conducting the following two missions: training and advising Afghan forces, and supporting counterterrorist operations against the remnants of al-Qaeda as well as other

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ D.M. Abshire, R. Browne, op. cit.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 61.

⁴⁹ B. Feller, *Obama Sees 'New Day' 1 Year after Bin Laden Raid*, Associated Press 2012, available at <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/obama-afghanistan-sign-security-pact-16254609?page=2#.T6KifethvPo> (date accessed 2.05.2012).

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ B. Feller, op. cit.

⁵² Ibidem.

terrorist groups⁵³. And although President Obama later intended to decrease the number of American troops in Afghanistan to 5,500 by the end of 2016, he delayed his plans. In June 2016 the White House provided the following data on Afghanistan:

The United States continues to undertake two narrow missions in Afghanistan. First, the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have transitioned to a non-combat mission of training, advising, and assisting the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). Second, the United States maintains a counterterrorism capability in Afghanistan to continue to target the remnants of al-Qa'ida, ISIL-K, and other terrorist groups in the region, and prevent an al-Qa'ida resurgence or external plotting against U.S. targets or the homeland... The President decided in October 2015 to maintain the current posture of 9,800 troops in Afghanistan through most of this year-2016. In addition, he has decided that, instead of going down to a normal embassy presence in Kabul by the end of 2016, we will maintain 5,500 troops at a small number bases, including at Bagram, Jalalabad in the east, and Kandahar in the south⁵⁴.

In his July the 7th statement President Obama made it clear that he had changed his mind to cut US troop levels to 5,500, and that the new total now would be 8,400. Obama also made the following declaration:

...the only way to end this conflict and to achieve a full drawdown of foreign forces from Afghanistan is through a lasting political settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban. That's the only way. And that is why the United States will continue to strongly support an Afghan-led reconciliation process, and why we call on all countries in the region to end safe havens for militants and terrorists⁵⁵.

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that Afghanistan has become “the template for a new kind of warfare - a chronic conflict, across an arc of unstable states, in which the United States is a participant, if not the principal actor”, in the interview in September 2016 Obama did not agree with the suggestion that his strategy had failed emphasizing the fact of the reduction of US troops in Afghanistan and the continuation of the training and assisting

⁵³ A.H. Cordesman, *The Obama Strategy in Afghanistan: Finding a Way to Win*, Center for Strategic and International Studies 7 July 2016, p. 7, available at https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/160707_Obama_Strategy_Afghanistan_Final.pdf (date accessed 12.12.2017).

⁵⁴ A.H. Cordesman, op. cit.

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

mission, “even if the line between that and actual combat was sometimes blurry”⁵⁶.

Success or failure? Critical analysis of the effectiveness of US strategy in Afghanistan

The United States has been waging the war on terror for nearly 18 years. As of 2016, the costs of the war include 6,874 service members killed, 2.5 million Americans sent to fight, and an estimated \$4.4 trillion dollars spent⁵⁷. The stated objectives of the US war have remained practically unaltered over the time being as follows: “protecting Americans, preventing terror attacks, defeating specific terror groups, and diminishing the conditions that fuel terrorism through promoting democracy”⁵⁸. Immediately after the 9/11 attacks President Bush declared the main US goal - to defeat al-Qaeda and all terrorist groups with global reach. Later, President Obama echoed the objective adding the Islamic State to the list. As Erik W. Goepner argues, both administrations “pursued a broad objective of preventing terror attacks worldwide and a narrower one of protecting Americans and the homeland”, at the same time seeking “the additional goals of diminishing the underlying conditions that facilitate terrorism by promoting democracy”⁵⁹. However, it is not so easy to assess the effectiveness of the US efforts taken throughout the course of the war on terror due to the complicated political environment in which the 9/11 attacks and US responses took place. What is more, in the course of 2001-2017 American leaders have faced re-elections, and significant national debates have taken place concerning the decision to invade Iraq, the closing of the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, the use of drones, etc. Nevertheless, according to Goepner, little quantitative analysis has been conducted so far to estimate what US efforts have achieved in the war on terror⁶⁰.

According to Perry & Kassing, some of the activities that were successful in Afghanistan, especially during the first months of the OEF mission,

⁵⁶ M. Landler, *The Afghan War and the Evolution of Obama*, “The New York Times” 1 January 2017, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/01/world/asia/obama-afghanistan-war.html> (date accessed 12.12.2017).

⁵⁷ E.W. Goepner, *Measuring the Effectiveness of America's War on Terror*, The US Army War College Press 2016, p. 107, available at <http://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/3323.pdf> (date accessed 14.12.2017).

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 108.

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, p. 111.

could be attributed to the Special Operation Forces (SOF), soldier performance, force protection, detainee and logistics operations, communications, and the use of UASs and other new technologies⁶¹. Thus, for example, the thorough selection, training, equipping, and rigorous preparation of SOF played a significant role in the destruction of the Taliban government as well as in the early hunt for al-Qaeda, while the abilities of junior officers and non-commissioned officers and the skills of the troops enabled them to serve responsively and effectively.⁶² As for force protection, it was well maintained thanks to the discipline of the army forces, which helped to keep their bases protected and avoid significant casualties.⁶³ The detainee operations mission was also efficient and quick thanks to the rapid organization and assignment of military police, infantry, engineering, and logistics skills, whereas logistics operations themselves suffered no major interruptions in spite of the harsh environment and dispersed locations.⁶⁴ Finally, the use of several new technologies by the US Army including UASs and air-delivered weapons as well as such communications facilities as satellite bandwidth had the most significant effect on the command and management of operations⁶⁵.

According to another scholar, Elizabeth A. Bennet, there have been several highly relevant changes in the US security and counterterrorism policy since September 11, 2001, which include an increased leveraging of development aid, the need to address the “new” kind of terrorism, and the use of counternarcotics operations to counter the financing of international terrorism.⁶⁶ However, as Bennet points out, the lines between security, development and democracy are “blurring” as the development aid is getting “increasingly militarized, politicized, and securitized in its objectives and allocation”; the war is now mainly based on matters of ideology, which requires both development and democracy building as enemy fighters are no longer “hierarchically and bureaucratically organized foreign states, but are instead loosely organized transnational networks of extreme thinkers who rely on a myriad of funding sources”; and, finally, the potential to use coun-

⁶¹ W.L. Perry, D. Kassing, *Toppling the Taliban: Air-ground Operations in Afghanistan, October 2001-June 2002*, RAND 2015, Santa Monica, CA, p. 119-120.

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ Ibidem.

⁶⁴ W.L. Perry, D. Kassing, op. cit.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ E.A. Bennet, *Overstating Poppy: The U.S. Counternarcotics, Counterterrorism, and Development Policy Nexus in Afghanistan*, “The Journal of International Policy Solutions” Winter 2010, Vol. 12, p. 20.

ternarcotics as a strategy for countering the financing of terrorism is “heavily overstated”⁶⁷.

As emphasized earlier, American efforts to fight terrorism have been tremendous. However, despite these efforts, as Goepner observes, “the primary objectives have gone unmet”, and some areas have even worsened⁶⁸. This situation may have resulted from “implementing policies that motivated people to join terror groups and made terrorism more feasible”⁶⁹. Firstly, the massive American military presence and military actions “increased the motivation, both in terms of grievance and greed, for people to join the terrorists’ ranks and for the terrorists to step up the pace of attacks”⁷⁰. Moreover, a great amount of US dollars brought to Afghanistan might have encouraged corruption and criminal activity inside and outside the government, whereas corrupt state security forces might have provided a favourable environment for organizations engaged in criminal and terror activity. Secondly, creating successful democracy in Muslim countries is a great challenge and very often impossible. Even before the 9/11 attacks liberal institutions and culture were not present in most Muslim countries, therefore “America’s push to democratize Afghanistan”, may have increased terrorism and insurgency, especially in the case of intermediate forms of government and young democracies with ineffective state security force.⁷¹ Thirdly, due to the negative effects of the long-lasting war and the trauma connected with it, which the Afghan population had suffered for decades before 2001, attempts to replace the autocratic government in Afghanistan with a representative one was unlikely to succeed⁷².

Some scholars argue that the United States should reduce military operations in Afghanistan as the problems in the country rather require political solutions coming from those directly involved. As Goepner points out, the USA has been providing to Afghanistan “herculean levels of assistance for more than a decade”, but as it can be seen from the current situation, “the will of host governments continues to falter”⁷³. Besides, the neighboring states in the region continue to be only partially engaged in providing assistance despite the fact of being better positioned.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

⁶⁸ E.W. Goepner, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 117.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ E.W. Goepner, *op. cit.*

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ Ibidem, p. 119.

Taking the available data on the effectiveness of US counterterrorism policy into account, one can draw a conclusion that the efforts the country has taken so far have not met the expectations in achieving the stated objectives. More Americans have been killed in terrorist attacks after the events of 9/11, and terrorist groups of global reach, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, have not been defeated. For example, an average of 65 Americans were killed each year by terrorists for the 12-year period following 9/11, as compared to 57 annually in the 12 years before 9/11⁷⁴. The same concerns the number of terror attacks which had risen to 16,818 by 2014 as compared to 1,880 in 2001⁷⁵. According to Goepner, US efforts have had a significant but negative impact on terrorism over the past years and “are correlated with a worsening of the overall terror situation”⁷⁶. Thus, for instance, for every billion dollars spent and 1,000 American troops sent to fight the war on terror, the number of terror attacks in the world had increased by 19 by 2016⁷⁷. Moreover, in terms of recruitment by terrorist organizations, the situation has also got worse. There were about 32,200 fighters in 13 Islamist-inspired foreign terrorist organizations in 2000, but by 2013, that number had risen to more than 110,000 in 37 terrorist organizations⁷⁸. Finally, as far as the promotion of democracy is concerned, its effectiveness in Afghanistan after the year 2001 is not so significant as the country is considered “moderately fragmented”, and around 10-25 per cent of it is ruled by authorities unconnected to the central government⁷⁹.

Some experts believe that the American security strategy for Afghanistan needs to be reviewed. In June 2017 Jim Mattis, US Secretary of Defense, acknowledged that the USA is not winning in Afghanistan right now as there has been an increased insurgency of the Taliban recently⁸⁰. The 2017 UN report on the situation in Afghanistan shows that the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) continue to face “an intensifying insurgency” and describe the conflict as “unrelenting”⁸¹. According to the report, the number of security incidents during the first 3 months of 2017

⁷⁴ Ibidem, p. 112.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 113.

⁷⁶ Ibidem, p. 111.

⁷⁷ Ibidem.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. 113.

⁷⁹ E.W. Goepner, op. cit.

⁸⁰ G.A. Fine, *Operation Freedom's Sentinel*, Report to the United States Congress 1 April 2017 – 30 June 2017, p. 2, available at https://oig.state.gov/system/files/lig_oco_ofs_jun17_508.pdf (date accessed 14.12.2017).

⁸¹ Ibidem.

was the highest recorded since 2001, and record numbers of civilians were killed and injured as a result of armed conflict during the first 6 months of 2017⁸². Moreover, the Taliban continue to target military facilities of foreign and Afghan security forces. For example, they launched the deadliest attack on Afghan security forces since 2001 when 10 insurgents attacked the largest Afghan National Army (ANA) base in northern Afghanistan on April 21, killing 144 Afghans and wounding 65⁸³.

In addition, despite successful offensive operations against ISIS-K, its ability “to mount suicide attacks and replenish its forces” in Afghanistan has remained⁸⁴. For example, it managed to carry out one suicide bombing in Kabul during each month of the first quarter of 2017, and on 17 May, it performed a coordinated attack by four fighters on an Afghan television station in Jalalabad as a result of which six Afghans were killed and four wounded⁸⁵. ISIS-K recruits fighters from a variety of sources including Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and other Central Asian countries, and sponsors madrassas (Islamic religious schools) in Pakistan which train children to become future terrorists⁸⁶.

According to G.A. Fine, the key challenges Afghanistan faces today in terms of security and building capacity are:

- *The ANDSF face an intensified insurgency as the Taliban mount country-wide attacks.*
- *Pakistan continues to provide sanctuary and support to the Taliban.*
- *The Afghan-Pakistani military-to-military relationship has grown hostile with decreasing opportunities for collaboration on security matters.*
- *The Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan is able to conduct suicide attacks and regenerate its forces despite aggressive U.S. and Afghan efforts to eliminate it.*
- *Civilian casualties continue at record high numbers.*
- *Weak leadership and corruption remain the two significant impediments to strengthening ANDSF capabilities. Middle management in the Ministry of Interior is described as “truly corrupt”⁸⁷.*

⁸² Ibidem, p. 3.

⁸³ Ibidem.

⁸⁴ Ibidem, p. 4.

⁸⁵ Ibidem.

⁸⁶ Ibidem.

⁸⁷ G.A. Fine, op. cit, p. 4.

Prospects for the US counterterrorism policy in Afghanistan

It can be clearly seen from the information presented in this paper that Afghanistan today is a “war-torn country” which “yearns for peace”⁸⁸. As Sattar Kingrani observes, life in the country has been paralyzed and its economy is “in tatters”: nearly ninety per cent of its GDP comes from foreign funding, the unemployment ratio is extremely high, and about fifty per cent of Afghanistan’s population is unemployed⁸⁹. Moreover, the Taliban and al-Qaeda have turned the country into ruins, and suicide bombing, bloodshed, and massacre of innocent people are carried out on a daily basis. For example, the last six months of 2017 was an extremely bloody period in Afghanistan, with the death toll amounting to hundreds of deaths: there were suicide bombers targeting funerals and banks, a massive blast in June killing at least 150 in the capital of Kabul, and another one in November rocking a Shiite mosque⁹⁰. Therefore, Afghanistan desperately needs peace and a new strategy to resolve the conflict.

Nevertheless, the newly elected president of the United States of America Donald Trump has recently confirmed that America’s longest war will last longer as he has made a decision to expand the military mission in Afghanistan. In last year’s speech at the Fort Myer military base in Virginia Trump stated he was going to use a “conditions-based” approach instead of “a timetable to get out of Afghanistan”, and he also promised to use all the elements of US power - diplomatic, economic and military - in order to win the conflict⁹¹. This is what Donald Trump said:

My first instinct was to pull out. Historically, I like following my instinct. But all my life I've heard that decisions are much different as you sit behind the desk of the Oval Office. The consequences of a rapid exit are both predictable and unacceptable. A hasty withdrawal would create a vacuum that terrorists, including ISIS and al-Qaida, would instantly fill, just as happened before Sept. 11... Our troops will fight to win from now on. Victory will have clear definition⁹².

⁸⁸ S. Kingrani, *Afghanistan: Peace Process: Hurdles and Prospects*, “Young Diplomats” 2 July 2017, available at <http://www.young-diplomats.com/afghanistan-peace-process-hurdles-prospects-part-1/> (date accessed 16.12.2017).

⁸⁹ Ibidem.

⁹⁰ B. Westcott, *Afghanistan: 16 Years, Thousands Dead and No Clear End in Sight*, The CNN 1 November 2017, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/21/asia/afghanistan-war-explainer/index.html> (date accessed 16.12.2017).

⁹¹ S. Milligan, *Trump to Expand Military Operations in Afghanistan*, U.S. News & World Report 21 August 2017, available at <https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2017-08-21/trump-to-expand-military-operations-in-afghanistan> (date accessed 16.12.2017).

⁹² S. Milligan, op. cit.

Although President Trump did not specify in his speech the exact number of troops he intended to send to Afghanistan, he said he was going to “expand authority for American armed forces to target the terrorist and criminal networks that sow violence and chaos throughout Afghanistan”⁹³. The US President also emphasized that he was not interested in nation-building or in “imposing a way of life on the Afghan people”, but his strategy was aimed “at making Afghanistan a place inhospitable to terrorists”⁹⁴.

As Susan Milligan notices, the current Trump’s strategy is “a reversal of Trump’s longtime insistence” that the United States needs to withdraw from a war that has cost billions of dollars and caused more than 2,400 American deaths.⁹⁵ Throughout the period of 2011-2014 Donald Trump clearly expressed his opinion that his country should stop wasting money and people’s lives in Afghanistan, and that it was high time to get out of there. When he campaigned for the White House, he promised to free the United States from foreign conflicts. However, now he acknowledges that “pulling out of Afghanistan might create its own set of problems, including added instability in the region”⁹⁶.

President Trump’s long-awaited strategy for resolving the nearly 16-year-old conflict in Afghanistan is supposed to be based on the deployment of more American troops to Afghanistan to continue to train Afghan forces as well as on convincing the Taliban that they cannot win on the battlefield⁹⁷. However, Trump has not specified what victory is going to look like, nor has he explained yet how his path will “be different from what he labeled the failed strategies of previous presidents”⁹⁸. According to Julie Hirschfeld Davis & Mark Landler, Trump has portrayed his strategy “as a stark break with the Obama administration”, stating that “while his predecessor set artificial timetables for American involvement in Afghanistan”, his strategy will be “a comprehensive, conditions-based regional approach” aimed at bringing a political solution there⁹⁹. What is more, Hirschfeld Davis & Landler assume that by “refusing to place a number on troops or to specify benchmarks for success”, Mr. Trump is “in essence shielding himself against poten-

⁹³ Ibidem.

⁹⁴ Ibidem.

⁹⁵ Ibidem.

⁹⁶ Ibidem.

⁹⁷ J. Hirschfeld Davis, M. Lander, *Trump Outlines New Afghanistan War Strategy With Few Details*, “The New York Times” 21 August 2017, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/21/world/asia/afghanistan-troops-trump.html> (date accessed 16.12.2017).

⁹⁸ Ibidem.

⁹⁹ J. Hirschfeld Davis, M. Lander, op. cit.

tial backlash from his political base and from the American public, which has grown weary of the war”¹⁰⁰.

In his speech in August 2017 Donald Trump also mentioned one more essential point which is connected with Pakistan. He said that the United States “would put significant new pressure on Pakistan to crack down on the terrorist sanctuaries that line its border with Afghanistan”¹⁰¹. As Hirschfeld Davis & Landler believe, Trump’s comments “could open a turbulent new chapter in relations with Pakistan, which has veered since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks from being an ally in the fight against terrorism to a haven in which Osama bin Laden hid out until he was killed in 2011”¹⁰².

Some experts, however, feel quite pessimistic about Afghanistan’s future. For instance, Michael Kugelman, deputy director and senior associate for South Asia with the Asia Program at the Woodrow Wilson Center, believes that Trump’s options are limited, and there are no good options in Afghanistan at all¹⁰³. He is also convinced that Trump “can’t hope to win”, and that the best he can hope for is “some type of negotiated end to the war”, although it’s very difficult to imagine the USA, Afghanistan, “or any other stakeholder offering incentives that are sufficiently enticing to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table”.¹⁰⁴ Other experts argue that “defeating an insurgency through force alone is incredibly difficult”, and that “a surge of US troops onto the front line would be no solution at all”¹⁰⁵.

According to Hirschfeld Davis & Landler, Trump has expressed contempt on his predecessor’s strategy and has promised to avoid President Barack Obama’s mistakes, but, as it can be concluded from what he has presented so far in relation to his security strategy in Afghanistan, it is not so different from that of Obama’s and relies “on a mix of conventional military force and diplomatic pressure on Pakistan”¹⁰⁶. Thus, as the authors point out, there will be no significant change in the mix of American forces operating in Afghanistan, and the priorities will remain the same - training Afghan forces and conducting counterterrorism operations¹⁰⁷.

Sattar Kingrani, in turn, believes that there are several major obstacles for the peace process in Afghanistan. First, the Taliban are of the opinion

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem.

¹⁰² Ibidem.

¹⁰³ B. Westcott, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁶ J. Hirschfeld Davis, M. Lander, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁷ J. Hirschfeld Davis, M. Lander, *op. cit.*

that they are fighting for the independence of Afghanistan, and the US and its allies have occupied their land. Thus, the Taliban will not make any peace treaty with Kabul government until the US withdraws its forces. Second, ineffective border management between Afghanistan and Pakistan is a major barrier in achieving peace in Afghanistan and results in providing safe havens to various militant groups. Third, conflicts between the neighboring countries such as Afghanistan, India, Iran, and Pakistan also add to the devastation and destruction of Afghanistan. Fourth, ethnic diversity and conflict in Afghanistan is a big obstacle for the peace process as various ethnic groups, namely, Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and others do not like to co-operate and often regard themselves as better than the other groups. And finally, the Taliban hate democracy which is a western form of government and is against the teaching of Islam. Therefore, they will continue their struggle (jihad) until the Islamic Sharia law is enforced everywhere in Afghanistan¹⁰⁸.

Conclusion

To sum up, American involvement in Afghanistan since 2001 has been a long and costly enterprise. More than two thousand American troops have been killed during more than a decade of war, around 8,400 troops still remain stationed in Afghanistan, and further troops are going to join them in the near future. As Ben Westcott puts it, "America's longest war continues to trudge on and the bodies continue to pile up"¹⁰⁹. The American involvement in Afghanistan has been focused on several security strategies during its course, starting from counterterrorism and gradually adding nation-building and democracy promotion. The Bush administration was clearly in favour of counterterrorism, and the main goal was to eradicate al-Qaeda and the Taliban. By the time the Bush administration realized that nation-building and democracy promotion were also vital, most of its resources had already been diverted to Iraq. This fact enabled insurgents to regroup and regain strength. According to Hassan & Hammond, the Bush's Freedom Agenda for Afghanistan was "deeply troubled from its inception"¹¹⁰. Although the Bush administration claimed that it managed to spread freedom and create "young democracy", the real situation was reverse, and "a deeply disturbing picture of mishandling and negligence" could be ob-

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁹ B. Westcott, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁰ O. Hassan, A. Hammond, *op. cit.*

served¹¹¹. Thus, when President Obama took over the war in Afghanistan, the situation he had inherited made it impossible to pursue a democratic policy, and he had to adopt a new stabilization and exit strategy.

In conclusion, the security, political and social situation in Afghanistan today is still a major challenge for the United States. Afghanistan remains a poor and violent country. Nevertheless, many experts agree that a positive difference can be made in Afghanistan if the right time, resources, and leadership are applied. The newly elected US President Donald Trump has recently presented his strategy for resolving the nearly 16-year-old conflict in the country. The strategy assumes a comprehensive, conditions-based regional approach aiming at finding a political solution in Afghanistan. Although some analysts believe that whatever Trump decides to do, “there will be no swift end to the conflict”, only the future will show if it is going to be a success¹¹².

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¹¹¹ Ibidem.

¹¹² B. Westcott, op. cit.

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