

The Failure of America's Transferal Policy from the Cold War to the War on Terror

Jason Cooley¹

Introduction

When a nation is attempting to become a potent force in the world, its leaders have a propensity to focus on the positives that will surface once this goal is achieved. What they fail to take into consideration is the manner in which several problems also emerge after a considerable amount of power is acquired. Some of these issues can be resolved rather quickly, but others take a lot of time to rectify because they are extremely complicated. One of the problems that take up much of the time of policymakers from a world power is instability within nations where military interventions are taking place. If instances from the past are examined, it becomes quite apparent that one of the ways that a major power deals with disorder is by using transferal, a policy that consists of handing security responsibilities from the intervening soldiers to indigenous parties. While the Cold War was in progress, American officials exhibited an affinity for the transferal policy. It can be said that this fondness did not dissipate following the downfall of the Soviet Union because Washington has continued to make transfers in the campaign against Islamic extremist organizations. Within this article, the reader will have an opportunity to see how it would be advantageous for the United States to move away from this approach since poor transfers in Vietnam and Afghanistan will be subjected to analysis. We will begin with the case from the Cold War.

American Intervention in Vietnam from 1955 to 1973

Over the years, much attention has been paid to the problems that American troops encountered in Vietnam during the presidencies of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. As a result, many U.S. citizens presume that American involvement in this Southeast Asian nation commenced while the former was in office from 1963 to 1969. In order to locate the real beginning of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, though, it is necessary to go all the way back to the end of the French-Indochina War. After French soldiers surrendered at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the members of the Vietminh, a resistance group that had been fighting against the French, hoped they would be able to determine the future of Vietnam without any outside interference. However, they were unable to do so because capitalist and communist powers at a conference in Geneva decided to temporarily divide the country at the seventeenth parallel.¹ When scheduled elections to reunify the country were not held, Vietnam started to look like Korea. Above the seventeenth parallel, one could find a government led by communists. Just below this boundary, there was a regime controlled by capitalists.

Ngo Dinh Diem, the president of the capitalist government in Saigon, did not hesitate to enter into a partnership with the United States. As an ally of the United States in the campaign against international communism, Diem received a considerable amount of assistance, including special operations soldiers and other actors to train anti-communist forces behind the scenes.² Some of this covert training was provided while John F. Kennedy was in the Oval Office. For example, at the beginning of 1961, the thirty-fifth president instructed the Central Intelligence Agency to have its trainees in Laos conduct guerrilla operations inside North Vietnam.³

Later in 1961, Kennedy made another decision that had a major impact on the American effort in South Vietnam. Within *The Strategy of Subversion*, Paul Blackstock alludes to the manner in which certain presidents elect to turn covert interventions into overt military campaigns. There is no doubt that Kennedy is one of these presidents.

¹ University of Hartford, 200 Bloomfield Avenue, West Hartford, CT 06117-1599

When Kennedy was sworn into office, approximately five hundred American soldiers were involved in the campaign to weaken the communist insurgency.

Rather than provide the members of this small contingent with the opportunity to continue operating discreetly in different locations, Kennedy elected to establish a far more noticeable presence in South Vietnam by increasing the amount of soldiers to 16,000.⁴ As these additional soldiers began to arrive during the latter stages of 1961, they assisted with the training program that could no longer be run in a clandestine fashion.

From the developments that took place in the final year of his abbreviated presidency, it can be gathered that Kennedy came to regret the decision to conduct the campaign in South Vietnam in an overt fashion. For many years, the Vietcong was the only subversive actor that received attention from policymakers in Washington. However, in 1963, they were forced to expand their focus when Buddhist dissidents started to set themselves on fire in the streets of Saigon and other South Vietnamese cities. During the month of September, Kennedy sent Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defense, and Maxwell Taylor, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Southeast Asia to evaluate the conditions in South Vietnam. Upon their return to Washington, they informed the president that the situation had deteriorated considerably since the self-immolations.⁵ Approximately one month after he received this discouraging news, Kennedy told his subordinates that he wanted to start withdrawing the 16,000 soldiers in South Vietnam at the end of 1963.⁶

It can be said that Lyndon Johnson handled America's major domestic problem in the same manner as his predecessor. After all, in the aftermath of Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963, Johnson worked to end racial injustice by pushing for the continuation of desegregation. Continuity could be found on the domestic front, but it was not present at the international level. Instead of withdrawing American personnel from South Vietnam, Johnson decided to send more soldiers to this country. What must be emphasized at this juncture is the way that these soldiers became involved in a far different mission than the troops who arrived in Southeast Asia during the Kennedy years. When Kennedy sent additional troops, he opted to preserve the policy of training fighters who were opposed to the Vietcong. As reinforcements were added under Johnson, the decision was made to Americanize the war effort in South Vietnam. That is, Johnson started to have American personnel serve in combat operations against figures who were affiliated with the Vietcong.

Johnson was hoping that the inclusion of American combat troops would alter the course of the conflict. While members of the South Vietnamese military conducted clear and hold missions in the countryside, the number of villages under Vietcong control drastically increased.⁷ Once U.S. soldiers assumed control of these operations, there was not a noticeable decline in communist influence within South Vietnam. Rather, the Vietcong just kept gaining control of territory across the countryside. If a future American diplomat's experience is taken into consideration, it will be possible to notice how the situation in South Vietnam continued to deteriorate after U.S. combat forces were introduced. During the fall of 1965, Henry Cabot Lodge, the American Ambassador to South Vietnam, asked Henry Kissinger to assess the campaign against the Vietcong. Following his arrival in South Vietnam, Kissinger went on an extensive tour of the country, which included a stop in the province of Vinh Long. When Kissinger was in Vinh Long, he was informed by a South Vietnamese official that eighty percent of the province was pacified. In the summer of 1966, Kissinger returned to Vinh Long and had another conversation with the same person. At one point in the discussion, he learned that the amount of territory under government control had been reduced to seventy percent.⁸

Although there were signs that the anti-communist government was losing control of South Vietnam, Johnson continued to add combat troops until 1968. If one wants to comprehend this perplexing decision, one must look closely at certain developments in Washington. Within *Victims of Groupthink*, Irving Janis alludes to how there are times when policy decisions are made in a setting where dissent is not tolerated. While examining the atmosphere inside the Johnson administration during the Vietnam War, it becomes clear that the thirty-sixth president was not amenable to hearing dissenting opinions.

When a member scrutinized the continued deployment of combat troops to Southeast Asia, he was replaced by a figure who was deemed to be a proponent of this ineffective policy. Out of all of these departures, the most noteworthy came at the beginning of 1968. For a considerable amount of time, Robert McNamara was known as one of the most ardent supporters of the way that Johnson was handling the war in Vietnam. However, in 1967, the Secretary of Defense started to have serious reservations about whether Johnson was dealing with the conflict

correctly. Soon after he shared his concerns in meetings with the president and other key advisors, he was asked to resign.⁹

As Johnson kept sending troops to South Vietnam, he also had to contend with critics outside of government. By the beginning of 1968, the anti-war movement had become so strong that Johnson decided not to seek another term in the Oval Office. Once Johnson announced that he would not be running for re-election, the Democratic nomination was pursued by several figures, including Hubert Humphrey. The Vice President went on to receive the nomination, but his dream of succeeding Johnson was never realized because he lost the general election to Richard Nixon, a Republican who promised voters that he would secure “an honorable end to the War in Vietnam.”¹⁰

It was not long after the transfer of power on January 20, 1969 that Nixon revealed how he intended to keep his campaign promise. At a press conference on March 14th, Nixon announced that he wanted to have the South Vietnamese military assume control of the campaign against the Vietcong from the United States. This is an indication Nixon was an advocate of the transferal policy that was alluded to in the preceding section. However, the thirty-seventh President of the United States never used the word transferal to describe what was supposed to happen on the ground in South Vietnam. Instead, he consistently referred to it as the Vietnamization of the war effort.¹¹ When a leader from one country wants to have forces from another nation take control of a military campaign, there are only two options available to him. One of them is to have the members of a particular army immediately take control of all the departing military’s responsibilities. If a leader does not find this option appealing, he can arrange for the responsibilities of his departing troops to be handed over in a gradual fashion. Nixon must be labeled as a proponent of the second approach since he was hoping to see the duties of the South Vietnamese military increase as American forces were withdrawn over time.

In order to find out how Nixon came to embrace this policy, it is necessary to take a particular figure into consideration. Within a preceding paragraph, it was mentioned that Henry Kissinger traveled to South Vietnam in 1965 and 1966 to evaluate the conditions in the country. Following these trips, he was asked by different publications to write articles about the conflict in Southeast Asia. Inside a *Foreign Affairs* article that was written towards the end of 1968, Nixon’s future National Security Advisor asserted that “the United States must cede increasing responsibility for the conduct of the war to the South Vietnamese.”¹² Since Kissinger was pushing for Vietnamization at this point, one must presume that he was the individual who convinced Nixon to utilize it during the following year.

Before the implementation of the Vietnamization policy is taken into consideration, there should be a discussion about the way it will be evaluated. When an analyst engages in policy evaluation, he or she can only conclude that a policy has been effective if an intended outcome surfaces following the implementation of it.¹³ In the case of Vietnamization, a planned result would be South Vietnamese troops maintaining control of provinces and villages as they take over the counterinsurgency campaign. Because keeping control of territory can be seen as a sign of effectiveness, one can consider the loss of it as an indication that Vietnamization was ineffective. There are two other outcomes that would force the researcher to conclude that Vietnamization did not work. Since Nixon’s policy was executed in a gradual manner, some Americans were still around to participate in operations against communist forces. If it is found that the maintenance or retaking of territory was primarily the work of remaining American personnel, it will be necessary to argue in favor of policy ineffectiveness.

Following the commencement of Vietnamization, many American soldiers were able to return to the United States. However, some were left behind to assume different responsibilities such as training South Vietnamese soldiers leading combat operations against communist forces. As 1972 got under way, it seemed as if the labor of these American advisors was starting to bear fruit. By this point, an American combined arms training program had helped produce over one million South Vietnamese soldiers who were capable of handling weapons.¹⁴

In addition to having training from qualified U.S. soldiers, the South Vietnamese were in possession of numerous weapons that had been made by defense contractors on American soil, including 844,000 individual and crew-served weapons and 778 helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft.¹⁵ Given all of this training and weaponry, it is easy to see why one veteran of the conflict said: “By the start of 1972, the RVNAF, on paper, was a formidable force.”¹⁶

Later in 1972, a communist offensive allowed observers to realize that the South Vietnamese military was actually in need of improvement. In 1968, the American and South Vietnamese governments were surprised when the North Vietnamese and Vietcong conducted a major offensive during the Tet holiday or Vietnamese New Year. Four years after this historic campaign, Washington and Saigon suspected another “major military action by the North

Vietnamese” and their southern ally was imminent.¹⁷ American and South Vietnamese officials knew that aggression was on the horizon, but these individuals could not adequately prepare for it because they did not know what areas the North Vietnamese and Vietcong were looking to acquire. Initially, it appeared as if the communists would manage to seize their targets. At the beginning of April, North Vietnamese soldiers pushed South Vietnamese troops out of Loc Ninh, a town in Binh Long Province. Approximately one month later, others moved into Quang Tri, a city just north of the former imperial capital of Hue.

The alarming developments in Southeast Asia prompted Nixon to have prolonged policy meetings with his advisors in Washington. When Nixon spoke to key figures from the branches of the American military, he was encouraged to deal with the aggression by conducting numerous air strikes against communist targets above and below the seventeenth parallel. However, during discussions with civilians from different bureaucratic departments, he was urged to refrain from taking this step because it would prevent a genuine test of the Vietnamization policy.¹⁸ The thirty seventh commander-in-chief eventually decided to provide the South Vietnamese forces with the aerial support that had been recommended by the individuals from the military. If the struggle over the city of An Loc is taken into consideration, it will become quite clear that the American air support proved to be decisive. Unlike Loc Ninh and Quang Tri City, An Loc never fell into the hands of communist forces. The failure to take this city cannot be attributed to a lack of effort since North Vietnamese troops attacked it on three separate occasions. We also cannot say that the North Vietnamese soldiers were overwhelmed by An Loc’s defenders because there were only 4,000 South Vietnamese soldiers within the city at the time of the final assault on May 9th.¹⁹ Once these possibilities are eliminated, the only alternative is to focus on the actions of American personnel. During the final battle for An Loc, a number of American aircraft bombed North Vietnamese positions around the city. Over one twenty-four hour period, there were even thirty strikes by B-52’s.²⁰ By the end of this intense air campaign, all of the North Vietnamese infantry units were eliminated and a considerable amount of the armed force was gone.²¹

The communist offensive in South Vietnam came to an end in September. In the immediate aftermath of this prolonged assault, a spirited debate transpired within the American government about the effectiveness of the Vietnamization policy. During different public appearances, key figures from the White House asserted that the president’s policy was working.²² There were also people in the military who believed the South Vietnamese had demonstrated that they were capable of leading the fight against the North Vietnamese Army and the Vietcong. Following a major battle, it is customary for witnesses and participants to be debriefed by their commanding officers. Upon observing the performance of the South Vietnamese’s 18th Infantry Division during the communist offensive, Colonel John C. Evans, an American advisor, told his superiors that this unit was “capable of sustained combat without U.S. advisors.”²³ As Evans was lauding the South Vietnamese military, other soldiers, who also witnessed its performance against the communists, provided a far more accurate evaluation. Bill Miller, another Colonel in the U.S. Military, saw the majority of the fighting that took place between the South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese near An Loc. When he was meeting with policymakers in Washington, he wisely pointed out how the outcome of the offensive was not an indication that Vietnamization was succeeding since the South Vietnamese would not have been able to keep or regain control of land without the assistance of U.S. advisors and airpower.²⁴

By the beginning of 1973, all American personnel were out of South Vietnam. While one concentrates on some of the fighting that took place after this juncture, one consistently comes across the second outcome which was alluded to earlier in this section. That is, one repeatedly encounters the loss of territory by South Vietnamese troops. During the early stages of 1975, the North Vietnamese Army once again resorted to aggression. In the month of January, North Vietnamese units assumed control of Phuoc Lang.

Two months after this victory, other units were able to defeat the South Vietnamese soldiers who were defending the city of Ban Me Thuot.²⁵ Because North Vietnamese forces were advancing at such a rapid pace, Nguyen Van Thieu, the final President of South Vietnam, was forced to increase the number of soldiers protecting Saigon. Although this step was taken, the North Vietnamese still managed to gain control of the South Vietnamese capital at the end of April.

American Intervention in Afghanistan from 2001 to the Present

During the 1980s, Richard Neustadt and Ernest May wrote a book called *Thinking In Time*.

Within it, they asserted that policymakers in Washington have a propensity to compare the crisis that they are dealing with to ones which were encountered by their predecessors.²⁶ While looking closely at American foreign policy in the

1980s and 1990s, one finds that the members of different presidential administrations were frequently using the campaign in Vietnam as a point of comparison. Since the effort in Southeast Asia was unsuccessful, these policymakers were not attempting to take the same steps as their predecessors. Instead, they were hoping that in-depth analysis would enable them to eschew major mistakes which had been made in the past. If attention is paid to George H.W. Bush's handling of the Persian Gulf War in 1991, it will be possible to notice how U.S. officials were determined to avert previous errors. Shortly after this conflict commenced, American soldiers managed to force Iraqi troops out of Kuwait. Once this objective was achieved, Bush was encouraged by civilian advisors such as Paul Wolfowitz to send American troops into Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein, the President, from power. As Bush was receiving this input, Colin Powell and other military advisors were urging him to exercise restraint because they feared that an invasion of Iraq would lead to a prolonged occupation like the one in Vietnam. Bush ultimately decided to refrain from extending this campaign in the Middle East.

Months into his first term, Bush's son was forced to deal with another foreign policy crisis. When he became president on January 20, 2001, George W. Bush was looking to focus most of his attention on domestic matters such as education. However, once terrorist attacks happened in New York and Washington on September 11th, Bush had to make combatting Islamic extremist groups his primary concern. Because al Qaeda, the organization that carried out the 9/11 attack was based in Afghanistan, Bush's foreign policy team had to develop a plan for intervening in this Central Asian nation. While Bush's advisors were in the process of developing a strategy, they did not use the American experience in Vietnam to guide their decision-making. Rather, they spent the majority of their time discussing the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s.²⁷ Since 80,000 Soviet soldiers were seen as occupiers by most Afghan citizens, the members of the Bush administration were reluctant to have a considerable amount of combat troops lead the intervention in 2001. In their eyes, a more appealing alternative was to have CIA paramilitary officers and special operations soldiers covertly enter Afghanistan to assist resistance groups that were attempting to overthrow the regime which was aligned with al Qaeda.

This was not the first time that the United States allocated covert aid to rebels in Afghanistan. When the aforementioned Soviet intervention was in progress, Washington also provided weaponry to parties who were working to bring the occupation to an end. What sets these American assistance programs apart is the manner in which military equipment was given to the recipients. Back in the 1980s, American officials elected to distribute aid through the neighboring country of Pakistan.²⁸ Meanwhile, American assistance during the early portion of the twenty-first century was provided in a direct fashion. These aid programs may have been structured differently, but they still went on to generate similar outcomes. After aid was given indirectly in the 1980s, the performance of Afghan rebels on the battlefield improved considerably, which is the main reason why Moscow decided to order a withdrawal as the 1980s came to a close. Following the introduction of American clandestine assistance in 2001, resistance networks proceeded to overthrow Mullah Omar and the other key members of the Taliban government.

If the preceding contention about the impact of American assistance in the early part of the twenty-first century is going to be persuasive, it will be necessary to closely examine the conduct of certain dissident groups in Afghanistan. We will begin with the most influential network in the northern portion of the country. Compared to the southern group that will be taken into consideration shortly, the Northern Alliance was quite diverse. In the middle of the 1990s, its Uzbek, Tajik, and Hazara fighters began to engage in battles against forces that were aligned with the Taliban. By September 2001, all these individuals had to show for their hard work was less than ten percent of the land in Afghanistan. At the end of September, the covert teams from the United States started to arrive in northern Afghanistan to allocate weapons, night vision goggles, and other supplies to the units in the Northern Alliance. During the months of October and November, there were signs that sections of the Northern Alliance were benefiting from this aid. For an extended period of time, fighters under the command of Abdul Rashid Dostum had been unable to seize control of Mazar-e-Sharif because they had an inadequate supply of weapons.

When these individuals received more weapons from the United States in the middle of October, they experienced multiple victories on the battlefield. Later in the month, they managed to drive "much larger Taliban forces" toward Mazar-e-Sharif.²⁹ Then, on November 9th, they forced Taliban loyalists out of this key northern city. The resistance groups in the southern portion of Afghanistan primarily consisted of Pashtuns. Of all these networks, the most promising was the one led by Hamid Karzai. At the end of September, Karzai met with CIA agents in Pakistan to discuss the political situation in his native country. While this meeting was in progress, Karzai was advised to refrain from returning to Afghanistan until more American clandestine operators were present in the south, but he refused to

do so. Upon returning to Afghanistan, Karzai and his followers settled in Tarin Kowt, a town in the southern portion of Urozgan. It did not take long for a battle to take place between Karzai's faction and Taliban loyalists in Tarin Kowt. Although Karzai's supporters worked assiduously to maintain control of the town during the battle, it eventually fell into Taliban hands. Prior to the Taliban's entry into Tarin Kowt, the U.S. conducted an airlift operation in order to keep the members of the Karzai group from being killed or captured.³⁰

Shortly after the fall of Tarin Kowt, Karzai's contingent returned to southern Afghanistan with the help of a six-man CIA team, a twelve-man Special Forces unit, and a three-man Joint Special Operations Command Unit.³¹ In addition to providing this transportation, these American covert operatives allocated machine guns, recoilless rifles, mortars, and communication equipment to the individuals in the Karzai group.³² With this American equipment, Karzai and his supporters were able to defeat Taliban units on more than one occasion. One of their most important victories took place in the middle of November. At this time, the rebellion in northern Afghanistan was coming to an end since the Northern Alliance was taking control of many Taliban strongholds. It seemed as if the insurgency was also winding down in the south, not because rebel networks were seizing territory like their northern counterparts, but because the Taliban was close to eliminating the remaining pockets of resistance. When Karzai supporters withstood a major assault on November 17th, the Taliban started to lose this momentum. By the early portion of December, they no longer had control of important southern cities, including Kandahar.

Some would probably argue that the main factor which contributed to the downfall of the Taliban regime in the latter stages of 2001 was the overt assistance being provided by the United States from the air. As rebels in northern and southern Afghanistan were fighting with American weapons on the ground, U.S. warplanes were dropping bombs on numerous Taliban positions. It cannot be denied that this aerial campaign helped the Northern Alliance and Karzai group liberate Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar, and other cities, but what needs to be pointed out is the manner in which these pilots would not have been able to make this contribution without help from covert operatives on the ground. While some CIA paramilitary officers and special operations soldiers were working with rebels in the north and south, others were using GPS and other forms of technology to identify bombing targets for pilots in the air. One begins to recognize the importance of these other clandestine operators while looking at the remarks of individuals who observed their efforts. During the campaign against the Taliban, Gary Schroen served as the leader of one of the CIA's paramilitary teams in northern Afghanistan. Within *First In*, he mentions that: "In a one-month period, from 27 September to 26 October, our team produced more than four hundred intelligence reports, most from the efforts of the joint cell. This intelligence allowed U.S. military aircraft to strike Taliban and al-Qaida positions with great accuracy and a minimum of collateral damage."³³ At another point in *First In*, Schroen alludes to how some Northern Alliance figures even talked about the valuable intelligence that was being produced for the bombing raids. At one point in a November meeting, Bismullah Khan, the leader of Northern Alliance forces on the Kabul front, said: "Your men and the Special Forces soldiers did outstanding work. The enemy fought hard here at Highway One, and the airstrikes your team was able to call in proved decisive. Please forward my thanks to your men."³⁴

Since the initial portion of the intervention in Afghanistan consisted of a substantial amount of participation from clandestine operatives, one can make the claim that it commenced in the same manner as the mission in Vietnam. When the campaign in Vietnam was being discussed in the preceding section, it was noted how policymakers in Washington eventually had to establish an overt presence on the ground in this Southeast Asian nation to deal with a communist insurgency. Following the formation of a new Afghan government, a resistance campaign was launched by the Taliban, al Qaeda, and other Islamist organizations. Because the Afghan security apparatus was quite weak at this juncture, Hamid Karzai, the leader of the government, had to let foreign troops enter his nation to battle the insurgents.³⁵ Unlike the contingent in Vietnam, the unit in Afghanistan contained combat troops from nations besides the United States.

The majority of the individuals who were affiliated with the peacekeeping effort in Afghanistan participated in battles against insurgents. However, some were asked to perform another task while they were situated in this Central Asian nation. Since the new Afghan government did not have internal parties to turn to reduce instability, there was a need to develop a national police force and an army. The responsibility of building the former was given to personnel from Germany. Meanwhile, the assignment of constructing the latter was given to soldiers from the United States military.³⁶ In 2004, members of the Bush administration believed that progress was being made in the effort to develop a capable Afghan army. One of the individuals who were encouraged by what was happening in Afghanistan

was Dick Cheney. Within *In My Time*, Bush's Vice President mentions how many positive developments occurred inside Afghanistan in 2004, including the growth of the security forces.³⁷

Between 2005 and 2006, improvements continued to be seen on multiple fronts, but security was not one of them. Over this two year span, there was a drastic increase in the number of terrorist operations by the Taliban and other insurgent groups.³⁸ Besides carrying out more attacks, Islamist networks were becoming more influential throughout southern Afghanistan.³⁹ Not wanting to see the situation deteriorate further, Bush met with key advisors to develop a new strategy for the campaign in Afghanistan. During these discussions, Bush was informed that there were two options for dealing with the problem inside Afghanistan. One was to have the members of the new Afghan army assume the responsibility of protecting key towns and villages in southern Afghanistan.⁴⁰ The other was to send more American soldiers to Afghanistan to participate in the peacekeeping efforts inside this volatile region. Having just learned about the progress that the Afghan army made in 2004, it would be understandable for the reader to assume that Bush elected to utilize the first strategy. However, the forty-third American president eventually decided to increase the amount of soldiers in Afghanistan to 31,000.⁴¹

Bush's handling of the instability in Afghanistan is akin to the way that Lyndon Johnson dealt with the poor conditions in Vietnam. For a period of time, Barack Obama, Bush's successor, appeared to be similar to Johnson, too. While Obama's first year in office was in progress, alarming intelligence was once again coming out of Afghanistan. Within the preceding paragraph, it was mentioned that Islamist groups were beginning to attract a lot of followers across southern Afghanistan in 2005 and 2006. In 2009, they were taking control of different areas in this portion of the country, including five of the thirteen districts in Helmand Province.⁴² Upon hearing about these territorial gains by Islamists, Obama opted to drastically increase the amount of U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan. During the early portion of 2009, he informed the American public that 17,000 troops would be sent to Afghanistan. Then, towards the end of the year, he announced that another 30,000 would be deployed to this Central Asian nation. As was the case during the Bush years, there were candid discussions about whether the presence of a large amount of troops would prompt Afghan citizens to think of the American intervention as another occupation. Stanley McChrystal, the general who was leading the campaign in Afghanistan, went on to convince skeptics such as Robert Gates, the Secretary of Defense, that all of these American troops would not be viewed as occupiers because they would refrain from engaging in the activities that Soviet soldiers did in the 1980s. That is, they would not intentionally kill innocent civilians, eliminate "key pillars" of the Afghan social structure, and so forth.⁴³

During 2011, Obama began to handle the conflict in Afghanistan like Richard Nixon dealt with the one in Vietnam. Instead of making additional troop deployments, he started to have some troops return to the United States. If a soldier remained in Afghanistan, his main responsibility was training members of the national police force and army so they would be able to assume the responsibility of providing security in various provinces. Inside the prior section, Henry Kissinger was credited with convincing Nixon that it would be prudent to utilize the transferal strategy in Vietnam. While perusing certain documents about the policy debates in the Obama administration, one is led to believe that Gates played a major role in turning the forty-fourth president into an advocate of the transferal policy. Inside *Duty*, the Secretary of Defense mentions the manner in which Joe Biden, the Vice President during the Obama presidency, once told him: "Be very careful what you recommend to the president because he will do what you say."⁴⁴ Later in his memoir, Gates alludes to the way that he submitted a memorandum to Obama with a list of goals for Afghanistan in October 2009. At one point in this document, the Secretary said he would like to "grow the Afghan security forces" and eventually "transfer security responsibilities" to them.⁴⁵

In 2015, there were a number of times when Afghan security forces participated in intense battles against the Taliban. Among them was the fight for control of the northern city of Kunduz. Towards the end of April, this fight commenced with Taliban assaults on the four districts outside of Kunduz. By April 28th, Taliban loyalists had seized the majority of the suburb of Gortepa and forced local policemen to retreat on multiple fronts.⁴⁶ Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, Karzai's successor in Kabul, did not ask for American assistance to halt the Taliban offensive, but he did send additional troops to Kunduz. Although these reinforcements were provided, the Taliban continued to acquire territory. For example, during the month of July, Taliban fighters moved into towns in Khan Abad District, which is southeast of Kunduz.⁴⁷

It has already been established that a security transfer must be considered a failure if indigenous forces lose territory that had been previously held by troops from the United States. If we turn our attention to the final part of the battle for Kunduz, we will have an opportunity to see one of the other outcomes that indicates a transfer has been

unsuccessful. After acquiring a substantial amount of territory in the suburbs during the spring and summer months, Taliban fighters attacked the actual city in the fall. When they took control of every portion of Kunduz on September 28th, Ashraf Ghani finally requested assistance from the United States. Once American warplanes began to drop bombs on Taliban targets, Afghan security forces were able to regain the northern metropolis.⁴⁸

Given the setbacks in locations such as Kunduz, it would have been understandable if Obama abandoned the transferal strategy, but he continued to rely upon it for the remainder of his presidency. In fact, when he left office, 9800 American soldiers were still in Afghanistan to train members of the Afghan security forces. While he was on the campaign trail, Donald Trump was quite critical of the forty-fourth president's handling of the conflict in Afghanistan. Consequently, there was speculation that he would introduce a new policy once he was in the White House. However, he has not embraced another approach for dealing with this seventeen year old war. Instead, he has elected to preserve the policy of his predecessor by keeping U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan to continue the training of security personnel.

Conclusion

Inside *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, Alexander George and Andrew Bennett primarily concentrate on how researchers should develop and test theories. At one point, though, they take some time to discuss the ways an analyst can produce research that is useful to policymakers. During this discussion, they claim that it is important for an analyst to “indicate the conditions under which a strategy is likely to be effective or ineffective.”⁴⁹ This statement suggests that each policy developed by government officials goes on to be a success in some situations and a failure in others. However, as we have seen in this article, there are some policies that seem to fail every time they are utilized by the powerful. When the transferal policy was used by American leaders during the Cold War in nations like Vietnam, it did not generate favorable outcomes. Since the end of the Cold War, U.S. officials have been involved in a campaign to weaken the Islamic extremist groups that are present in the world. On certain occasions, they have attempted to make other security transfers in Muslim countries such as Afghanistan, but these efforts have turned out just like the ones from the Cold War.

Because full-scale interventions have consistently resulted in unsuccessful security transfers, one might argue that it would be advantageous for Washington to refrain from becoming involved in the affairs of Muslim nations in the future. However, 9/11 demonstrated what can happen when America disregards the activities in a particular Muslim state for an extended period of time.

If full-scale intervention and non-intervention are not the answers, then what would be the best policy for the United States moving forward? One promising option is limiting involvement in Muslim nations to allocating military assistance to parties that are in the process of fighting Islamist organizations. When Barack Obama was dealing with the conflict in Afghanistan during his second term, he also had to contend with the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Some urged Obama to deploy American combat troops to Iraq and Syria to cripple the Islamic State, but he opted to just provide aid to Iraqi and Syrian groups that were already fighting this radical group. There were eventually indications that this limited intervention was working, including the fall of the Islamic State's capital in Raqqa, Syria at the end of 2017.

Notes

¹ Stephen Ambrose and Douglas Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, New York: Penguin, 1997, p.138.

² Richard Helms, *A Look Over My Shoulder*, New York: Presidio Press, 2003, p.199.

³ Richard Shultz, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999, p.3.

⁴ Paul Blackstock, *The Strategy of Subversion*, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964, p.18.

⁵ Robert McNamara and Maxwell Taylor, Report to President Kennedy about the Conflict in Vietnam, 1963.

⁶ John F. Kennedy, National Security Action Memorandum 263, 1963.

⁷ McNamara and Taylor.

⁸ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1979, p.233.

⁹ Irving Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972, p.120.

¹⁰ Richard Nixon, Comments Made While Campaigning for President, 1968.

¹¹ Kissinger, p.272.

¹² Henry Kissinger, The Viet Nam Negotiations, *Foreign Affairs*, 47(2), 1969, pp.211-234.

¹³ Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997, p.91.

¹⁴ James Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004, p.122.

-
- ¹⁵ Nguyen Duy Hinh, Vietnamization and the Cease-Fire, 47, Sorley, Better War, p.306.
- ¹⁶ Willbanks, p.123.
- ¹⁷ General Creighton Abrams, Message to Admiral John McCain about the Possibility of a Communist Attack, 1972.
- ¹⁸ Kissinger, p.1113.
- ¹⁹ Willbanks, p.146.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² *Newsweek*, Vietnam: The Specter of Defeat, May 15, 1972, p.25.
- ²³ Colonel John C. Evans, Senior Officer Debriefing Report, February 21, 1973, Advisory Team 87, Third Regional Assistance Command, USAMHI.
- ²⁴ Colonel William Miller, Letter to James Willbanks, 1993.
- ²⁵ Willbanks, p.238.
- ²⁶ Richard Neustadt and Ernest May, *Thinking in Time*, New York: Collier MacMillan, 1986, p.1.
- ²⁷ George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2010, p.194.
- ²⁸ Gary Schroen, *First In*, New York: Ballantine Books, 2005, p.46.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p.247.
- ³⁰ George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007, p.220.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Schroen, p.112.
- ³⁴ Bismullah Khan, Comments Made about the Performance of American Covert Operators in the Fight Against the Taliban in Northern Afghanistan, 2001.
- ³⁵ Bush, p.207.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Richard Cheney, *In My Time*, New York: First Threshold Editions, 2011, p.419.
- ³⁸ Bush, pp.210-211.
- ³⁹ Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, New York: Sentinel, 2011, p.688.
- ⁴⁰ Marin Strmecki, Report about the Deteriorating Conditions in Afghanistan, 2006.
- ⁴¹ Bush, p.212.
- ⁴² Robert Gates, *Duty*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014, p.352.
- ⁴³ Ibid., p.360.
- ⁴⁴ Joseph Biden, Remarks to Robert Gates at White House Meeting, 2009.
- ⁴⁵ Robert Gates, Memorandum to President Barack Obama about the Conflict in Afghanistan, 2009.
- ⁴⁶ Mujab Mashal and Jawad Sukhanyar, Afghan Troops Rush to Kunduz Amid Taliban Assault, *The New York Times*, April 28, 2015.
- ⁴⁷ Joseph Goldstein, Taliban Makes Gains Across 3 Provinces in Afghanistan, *The New York Times*, July 28, 2015.
- ⁴⁸ Rod Nordland, Taliban End Takeover of Kunduz After 15 Days, *The New York Times*, October 13, 2015.
- ⁴⁹ Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, Boston: MIT Press, 2004, p.272.