



COUNTRY REPORT: Afghanistan

January 2011





Contents

Executive Summary 5

Master Narratives..... 11

 “The Great Game” 12

 “Liberators of Afghanistan” 15

 “Preserving Local Rule” 18

 “United Afghanistan” 21

 “Pakistan Takeover” 24

 “Right to Rule” 27

Appendix & Sourcing..... 31

 Afghanistan Audience Segmentation 32

 Sources 34



Executive Summary



OVERVIEW

Understanding master narratives can be the difference between analytic anticipation and unwanted surprise, as well as the difference between communications successes and messaging gaffes. Master narratives are the historically grounded stories that reflect a community's identity and experiences, or explain its hopes, aspirations, and concerns. These narratives help groups understand who they are and where they come from, and how to make sense of unfolding developments around them. As they do in all countries, effective communicators in Afghanistan invoke master narratives in order to move audiences in a preferred direction. Afghan influencers rely on their native familiarity with these master narratives to use them effectively. This task is considerably more challenging for US communicators and analysts because they must place themselves in the mindset of foreign audiences who believe stories that—from an American vantage point—may appear surprising, conspiratorial, or even outlandish.

This report serves as a resource for addressing this challenge in two ways. First, it surfaces a set of six master narratives carefully selected based on their potency in the Afghan context and relevance to US strategic interests. Second, this report follows a consistent structure for articulating these narratives and explicitly identifies initial implications for US communicators and analysts. The set outlined here is not exhaustive: these six master narratives represent a first step that communicators and analysts can efficiently apply to the specific messaging need or analytic question at hand. For seasoned Afghanistan experts, these narratives will already be familiar—the content contained in this report can be used to help check assumptions, surface tacit knowledge, and aid customer communications. For newcomers to Afghanistan accounts, these narratives offer deep insights into the stories and perceptions that shape the Afghan political context that may otherwise take years to accumulate.

Some master narratives cut across broad stretches of the Afghan populace, while others are held only by particular audience segments. This study divides Afghanistan into six audience segments that demonstrate how different master narratives resonate with different sections of the populace. Each of the six master narratives aligns with one or more of the following segments: Central Government Supporters, the Taliban, Pashtun Nationalists, Tajik Nationalists, Turkic Nationalists, and Hazara Nationalists. (See the Appendix for a detailed description of these audience segments.)

THE MASTER NARRATIVES

The table on the following page summarizes the six master narratives highlighted in this report. For each narrative, it specifies the relevant audience segments as well as the narrative's core themes. The condensed narrative description simulates the voice of someone who believes in the narrative itself, helping communicators and analysts immerse themselves in the mindset of the foreign audience.

About the Master Narratives Platform

This report is part of the master narratives platform, a collaboration between Open Source Center, Monitor 360, and other partners across the US Government. The master narratives platform is focused on surfacing and articulating master narratives across a range of important geographies. These insights can be used to better understand critical audience segments and key influencers, build analytic capabilities, and develop actionable messaging and counter-messaging strategies. To learn more about the master narratives platform and how it can be applied to your mission, contact Open Source Center at MasterNarratives@rccb.osis.gov.

Narrative Title & Audience Segments	Condensed Master Narrative A description of the master narrative as it might be articulated by one who subscribes to it	Core Narrative Themes
The Great Game <i>Broadly held across segments</i>	For centuries, foreigners brought violence, instability, and corruption as they fought over Afghanistan's prized location. The Americans are just the latest in a long series of foreign powers trying to control Afghanistan. However, Afghanistan has always been and will always be unconquerable, protected by warriors defending the homeland and the faith. Afghans must remain committed to their independence, and should not place their trust in foreigners who will inevitably leave.	Occupation, Pride, Independence, Resistance & Struggle, Nationalism, Inevitability
Liberators of Afghanistan <i>Taliban</i>	In the face of foreign crusaders seeking to conquer Afghanistan, Afghan freedom fighters have always protected the people and liberated the country. Today the Taliban has inherited this jihad, leading the people against the most powerful army in the world. As their grandfathers and fathers did before them, Afghans must fight against the foreigners and their puppet government in order to restore the Islamic Emirate and Afghan independence.	Nationalism, Independence, Inevitability, Righteous Cause, Restoration, Emancipation
Preserving Local Rule <i>Pashtun Nationalists, Tajik Nationalists, Turkic Nationalists, Hazara Nationalists</i>	For hundreds of years, local and tribal leaders have provided peace and stability to the Afghan people, guided by their own laws and customs. When power-hungry rulers have tried to steal authority from the tribe or village, these rulers have brought instability and violence to the country. Today, the Kabul government is trying to rule from afar, ignoring the authority of local leaders. Afghans should take control over their own destiny by remaining loyal to their local leaders and customs.	Tradition, Independence, Order & Continuity, Authenticity, Power & Control
United Afghanistan <i>Central Government Supporters</i>	Afghanistan's progress as a modern democratic nation was destroyed by the Soviet invasion and the subsequent civil war and Taliban rule. With the overthrow of the Taliban, Afghans finally have an opportunity to restore the modernization and progress first established by Zahir Shah, peacefully uniting the country behind a central government representing all Afghans. Afghans must support the central government if they hope to restore this glorious period and avoid civil war.	Restoration, Modernization, Unity, Nostalgia, Order & Continuity
Pakistan Takeover <i>Broadly held across segments, excluding Taliban</i>	The creation of Pakistan brought with it a new enemy bent on controlling Afghanistan at all costs. Since its founding, Pakistan has used secret plots and extremist agents to destabilize Afghanistan. Today, Pakistan is waiting for an opportunity to retake control of the country, playing an elaborate game in which it takes American money with one hand and arms extremists with the other. Afghans must remain vigilant against Pakistan and its ongoing plots.	Enemy Encirclement, Threat, Conspiracy, Vigilance, Survival, Victimization
Right to Rule <i>Pashtun Nationalists, Taliban</i>	Pashtun history in Afghanistan predates any other group, and Pashtun rule brought periods of great prosperity and security in Afghan history. Today, however, jealous and power-hungry minorities collaborate with foreign invaders against the Pashtuns and deny them their rightful place as Afghanistan's rulers. Pashtuns must demand that their power is restored if Afghanistan is to experience peace and prosperity once again.	Victimization, Pride, Restoration, Order & Continuity, Authenticity, Exceptionalism

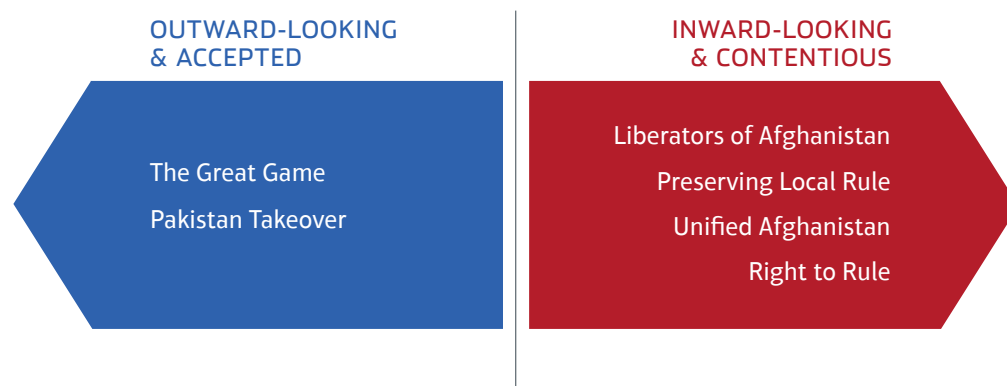
These master narratives were developed and validated through extensive open source research and subject matter expert outreach within the United States and in Afghanistan, and were further vetted by USG Afghanistan analysts.

KEY FINDINGS

Afghanistan's master narrative landscape reflects the country's instability, lack of centralized governance, and underdeveloped education and media infrastructure. As a result, the master narrative landscape highlighted here is different from those analyzed in other Master Narrative Country Reports. Afghan master narratives are hyper-localized: master narratives are recast to suit local conditions where there is no consistent, uninterrupted national dialogue about Afghan history and identity. In this respect, Afghan master narratives differ from those in countries where shared national identity or well-developed media environments enable greater consistency across broad audiences. How Afghan groups or communities describe or interpret these narratives can vary widely across regions. This report is a starting point for further exploring this array of localized master narratives, which would require investigating how each is reinterpreted according to cultural, political, and educational conditions at the local or tribal level. Furthermore, localization and underdevelopment leads Afghanistan to exhibit fewer broadly-held master narratives than countries such as Turkey, India, Pakistan, or

Iran. Given persistently low levels of literacy, education, and media access, it is arguably more difficult for a diverse set of master narratives to solidify at the national level in Afghanistan than elsewhere.

Afghanistan's master narrative landscape reflects a population capable of unifying in the face of shared foreign enemies or threats while simultaneously being susceptible to violent intergroup tensions. On the one hand, outward-looking narratives correlate with broad public consensus around sentiments of victimization at the hands of foreign powers and a deep-seated pride in Afghan independence. On the other hand, inward-looking narratives correlate with heated public debates over what constitutes legitimate authority in Afghanistan and who should hold that power. For communicators, outward-looking narratives (on the left in the figure below) present messaging challenges pervasive across Afghanistan, while inward-looking narratives (on the right) shed light on the political and cultural concerns of target audiences. For analysts, outward-looking narratives can be used to track shifting attitudes toward foreign actors such as the United States, while inward-looking narratives reflect domestic power dynamics.



OUTWARD-LOOKING & ACCEPTED NARRATIVES



These narratives are the product of Afghanistan's tumultuous history with world powers as well as its neighbor to the east, Pakistan. Unlike their inward-facing counterparts, these narratives enjoy broad consensus across Afghan audience segments. Communicators can turn to these narratives to better understand how and why Afghan audiences are wary of foreign intentions, presenting opportunities to avoid or alleviate ensconced suspicions about US actions in the region. Analysts can use these narratives to track how public attitudes toward foreign powers such as the United States and Pakistan are evolving over time, and to better understand how those views may impact interstate relations.

INWARD-LOOKING & CONTENTIOUS NARRATIVES



These narratives reflect the ongoing debate about who should govern Afghanistan and how. Unlike their outward-facing counterparts, these narratives are hotly contested and are often in direct competition with one another. Communicators can use these narratives to develop messaging that is more relevant to a particular target audience's political views, or to develop counter messaging against Taliban propaganda. Analysts can investigate competition dynamics between these narratives and the influencers who espouse them to better discern who holds power in a given area and whether those boundaries are stable or shifting.

Collectively, these narratives reflect a landscape dominated by three powerful and closely interwoven themes: victimization, pride, and independence. These themes reveal important lessons about how many Afghans perceive themselves and the world around them. First, history has conditioned many Afghans to be wary of foreign powers who have brought with them instability and bloodshed dating back to Alexander the Great. Second, the continued survival of Afghanistan and Afghan culture in the face of these powerful foreign adversaries is a source of broadly held pride that transcends ethnic divisions. Third, many Afghans are passionately committed to their own independence, and will readily stand up against any who might compromise it—regardless of whether they represent the Taliban, the United States, or the Afghan government. As actors continue to fight over who should rule Afghanistan and how, the success or failure of Afghan influencers and their causes will rest, in part, on their ability to effectively navigate these themes and the master narratives associated with them.

REPORT STRUCTURE & PAYOFFS

The remainder of this document provides greater analytic detail for the six master narratives outlined above. Each master narrative is articulated and analyzed in five pieces:

1. **Audience Segment:** With which audience segments does this master narrative reside?
2. **Master Narrative:** How might a subscriber to this master narrative describe it, what evidence reinforces these beliefs, and how do influencers leverage this narrative for their own political aims?
3. **Significance for Strategic Communicators:** How does this master narrative shed light on messaging opportunities and pitfalls?
4. **Significance for Analysts:** How can tracking this master narrative help analysts improve situational awareness, anticipate critical shifts in public debates, and better understand key influencers?
5. **Appendices:** The appendices for each master narrative highlight key phrases, symbols, or themes associated with the master narrative as well as relevant sourcing and validation. These appendices also provide detailed descriptions of each audience segment.

This report is not a silver bullet: improving US messaging and analysis will continue to rely on the creativity and expertise of communicators and analysts confronted with complex mission goals, changing local conditions, and bureaucratic constraints. What this report can do is help communicators and analysts more effectively place themselves in the shoes of foreign audiences. For communicators, this means avoiding costly pitfalls while more easily crafting effective messaging that taps into themes that resonate with foreign audiences. For analysts, this means better understanding key influencers and their messages, as well as shifting internal and external political dynamics. Finally, this report is an analytic exercise to support decision makers, who can use master narratives to better anticipate how foreign actors and audiences will interpret USG policies and actions. The insights and analysis provided in this report serve as a first step in providing communicators and analysts with the resources they need to seize upon those opportunities and, in doing so, strengthen US understanding of foreign audiences.



Master Narratives



"The Great Game"

AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Urban Democrats	Violent Islamists	Ethnic Nationalists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Central Government Supporters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Taliban 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pashtun Nationalists ➤ Tajik Nationalists ➤ Turkic Nationalists ➤ Hazara Nationalists

This master narrative resonates broadly across Afghan audience segments. In general, this master narrative focuses on shared anxieties about Afghanistan's experiences with foreign occupation. Subscribers to this narrative represent a range of Afghan audience segments, including: Central Government Supporters, Taliban, Pashtun Nationalists, Tajik Nationalists, Turkic Nationalists, and Hazara Nationalists. Local factors such as access to media and education, however, lead to wide variations in how this narrative is described and retold. As a result, some manifestations of this narrative may be more explicit and historically detailed while others may only invoke this narrative's underlying themes.

MASTER NARRATIVE: "THE GREAT GAME"

NARRATIVE: Afghanistan's prized location at the heart of Asia brought a plague of meddling and self-interested foreign powers to the country. In the 19th century, the British and Russians battled over Afghanistan to expand their imperial power. After World War II, the West and the Soviets brought their rivalry to Afghanistan, leading to the Soviet invasion and civil war. As they tried to seize Afghanistan, foreigners brought with them violence, instability, and corruption. The 2001 American invasion and occupation is just the latest in a long series of foreign powers trying to control Afghanistan in pursuit of their expansionist aims. And like those before them, the Americans will stop at nothing to maintain their foothold. What these foreigners forget is that no outsider—not even Alexander the Great or Genghis Khan—has ever been able to control Afghanistan in pursuit of their expansionist aims. History proves that Afghanistan is unconquerable, protected against foreign domination by warriors committed to defending the homeland and the faith. Learning from this history, Afghans should not place their trust in foreign powers, who are motivated by their own interests and will undoubtedly be expelled. Afghans must instead look out for their own interests to maintain their proud history of independence and protect themselves from foreigners' bloody games.

ANALYSIS: This broadly held master narrative is the source of two defining themes of the Afghan narrative landscape: victimhood and pride. On the one hand, the narrative underscores how Afghans have suffered in the crossfire between foreign competitors by invoking the nineteenth century "Great Game" rivalry between the British and Russian Empires. On the other hand, subscribers to this narrative take pride in Afghanistan's history of being "unconquerable," dubbed the "graveyard of empires" by many outside observers. For many Afghans outside of urban centers, this narrative is invoked using the language of jihad, in which foreigners are characterized as infidel colonialists. By characterizing the United States as another in a long list of great powers seeking to control Afghanistan, the narrative casts doubt on both US staying power and its stated goal of bringing stability to Afghanistan. How these doubts impact perceptions of the United States can vary widely depending on local politics, level of education, and access to information. Afghan media outlets often act as political mouthpieces and word-of-mouth remains an important news source for many.^{1,2} In this context, this master narrative supports wide-ranging allegations about the United States' "true" motives. These allegations include that the United States is interested only in containing Iran, that the Taliban receives covert US support because the Taliban's existence justifies continued US presence in the region, and that the CIA secretly controls the Afghan drug trade. This narrative also casts doubt on the legitimacy of the central government as well: in the context of past foreign invasion and occupation, many accuse Karzai of being a puppet installed by foreign powers just like past rulers Shah Shuja and Babrak Karmal (installed by the British and the Soviets, respectively).

Key influencers invoking this narrative are spread across diverse and competing political camps, indicative of how this narrative appeals to multiple audience segments. Influencers often use this narrative to blame foreign actors for Afghanistan's instability. Speaking in Dari in October 2010, Hamid Karzai compared ongoing US efforts to those of the Soviets in the 1980s, and doubted the genuineness of US intentions by stating, "There may come a day when the international community... will no longer see their interests in Afghanistan and will leave Afghanistan with a same speed as they did in the past."^{3,4} Others influencers are more direct in invoking themes of victory and inevitability: Taliban spokesman Zaibiullah Mujahid drew a parallel between the Soviet Union and the United States by stating, "This was [the Soviets'] graveyard... [a]s it will be for the Americans."⁵ Taliban messaging invoking the "Great Game" master narrative is often directed at both Afghan and foreign audiences. This messaging discourages Afghans from cooperating with US forces and the Afghan government.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

This master narrative presents US communicators with a challenging dilemma. On the one hand, messaging that emphasizes long-term US commitment in Afghanistan may be construed as evidence that, like the British and Soviets, the United States aspires to be a permanent occupier of the country, driven by its own strategic and economic interests, even if the narrative simultaneously holds that such a goal is destined for failure. As of the end of November 2010, the length of US military presence in Afghanistan exceeded that of the Soviet Union—historical landmarks such as these may further exacerbate negative comparisons between the United States and the Soviets. On the other hand, messaging related to eventual US withdrawal—regardless of the timeframe—may be claimed as a victory by insurgent forces, such as the Taliban, aiming to capitalize on Afghan pride in the country's history of expelling foreign forces [see: "Liberators of Afghanistan"]. As a result, any messaging regarding the United States' role in Afghanistan is likely to be subject to divergent and contradictory interpretations.

This narrative’s deeply engrained sense of national pride also presents US communicators with an opportunity: messaging that praises the historical strength, resolve, bravery, and independence of the Afghan people is likely to resonate with broad audiences. This praise may be a welcome sign of respect for Afghans accustomed to believing that foreign powers look at Afghanistan as a strategic asset or a pawn in larger international affairs.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANALYSTS

Afghan influencers channel this narrative’s themes of victimhood and pride into hostility toward US forces or efforts. The extent to which such persuasion strategies are effective could have a direct impact on public willingness to cooperate with the United States or its allies. Analysts may be able to use polling data from Afghanistan to approximate this master narrative’s resonance with different audiences. For instance, a July 2010 survey report found that 47 percent of Afghans in Helmand and Kandahar believe that foreign forces are fighting to either occupy Afghanistan or advance their own interests, compared with only 12 percent who believed foreigners fought to bring peace and security to the country.⁶ Such polling data can illustrate the endurance of Afghan suspicions grounded in the “Great Game” master narrative. Regional differentiations in this data could help analysts identify where the “Great Game” narrative is most potent, or having the greatest impact on local perceptions. Further, how these views evolve and change over time may reflect shifts in audience attitudes toward US efforts, including mounting anxieties or hostility.

The hostility inspired by this narrative could be channeled against other foreign actors beyond US forces. This master narrative’s historical roots date back centuries—the relatively recent addition of the United States to this narrative demonstrates its evolution and adaptability. Other countries that are politically and economically active in the region—such as China, Iran, or India—could similarly become new additions to the “Great Game” narrative, indicating growing anxieties or public opposition to their activities. If Afghan influencers consistently and successfully describe other countries as “Great Game” players in their messages, it could have an impact on both public attitudes toward those countries as well as interstate relations more broadly.

“Liberators of Afghanistan”

AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Urban Democrats

Central Government Supporters

Violent Islamists

➔ Taliban

Ethnic Nationalists

Pashtun Nationalists
Tajik Nationalists
Turkic Nationalists
Hazara Nationalists

Concentrated mainly in the southeastern part of Afghanistan, Taliban insurgents seek the removal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, the overthrow of the US-supported Kabul government, and the restoration of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. While in power, the Taliban instituted and enforced a strict form of Sharia law that drastically curtailed women’s rights and demanded strict adherence to their perception of Sunni Islamic orthodoxy. Though not monolithic in their views on how to engage the Afghan government and its US allies, the Taliban distrust them deeply and often advocate for direct violent confrontation.

MASTER NARRATIVE: “LIBERATORS OF AFGHANISTAN”

NARRATIVE: Marauding foreign crusaders have always plagued Afghanistan in their quest to exploit the country’s resources and people. Like the British and Soviets before them, the Americans imposed a war on the Afghan people and brought great suffering: corrupt puppet officials, violence, disrespect for Afghan values, and injustice. Yet Afghan freedom fighters have always risen to the challenge of liberating Afghanistan, expelling the most powerful armies in the world, from Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan to the British Empire and the Soviets. Today, the Taliban has inherited this jihad, leading brave warriors to expel the American occupiers. As their grandfathers and fathers did before them, Afghans are obligated (*farz or fard*) to wage jihad against the foreigners and their puppet government—even giving their lives, if necessary, in defense of Afghanistan’s freedom and independence. Those who fight will liberate the Afghan people by restoring the Islamic Emirate—a state that will provide fair and swift application of Sharia, an end to rampant corruption, restoration of local authority in line with Afghan values, and an end to the occupation claiming innocent Afghan lives. *Munafiqin* (hypocrites) who collaborate with foreign occupiers will face harsh retribution when the Americans are inevitably expelled and the Taliban retakes power.

ANALYSIS: The “Liberators of Afghanistan” master narrative is a Taliban reinterpretation of the broadly held “Great Game” master narrative [see: “The Great Game”]. For both of these master narratives, the British and Soviet invasions remain palpable symbols of Afghan oppression at the hands of foreigners. Further, both instill nationalistic pride in Afghanistan’s history of defeating powerful foreign enemies. They differ, however, in the attitudes and behaviors that this nationalistic pride encourages. Whereas the “Great Game” encourages Afghans to distrust foreigners and disengage from US efforts in the region, the “Liberators of Afghanistan” narrative encourages audiences to actively take arms against US and Afghan government targets in a coordinated insurgency. In doing so, the “Liberators of Afghanistan” narrative reflects Taliban efforts to add historical legitimacy and authority to their messaging, militancy, and claims to power by associating the movement with previous *mujahideen* factions that expelled the British and Soviet armies.

The Taliban relies on an elaborate public relations infrastructure to disseminate this message through websites, radio and television broadcasts, leaflets, public statements, and even songs and poetry.¹ For instance, one Taliban-sponsored video featured montages of anti-Soviet military operations from the 1980s in an effort to draw similarities between US and Soviet forces as well as similarities between the Taliban and the *mujahideen* who expelled the Soviets.² In his 2010 *Eid al-Adha* message, Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar celebrated Afghan fighters who “stood as a wall of iron in front of the invasions of Genghis, Britons and the communist colonialists.” Omar further emphasized the Taliban’s focus on Afghan independence: “This is the country of the Afghans. The Afghan will not relinquish of it. The resistance will continue as long as the invaders are stationed there.”³ By appealing to deep-seated historical grievances, Taliban communicators invoke this narrative to channel nationalistic pride into an insurgency against US forces and the threat and use of violence against Afghans who cooperate with them.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

This narrative is explicitly opposed to the US military presence in Afghanistan and US support for the Afghan government, leaving communicators with few opportunities to reach audiences who subscribe to it. Similar to the challenges presented by the “Great Game” master narrative, US messaging that emphasizes long-term commitment to peace and stability in the region may be construed by those who perpetuate the “Liberators of Afghanistan” master narrative as evidence of foreign occupation. Messaging that reflects an interest in eventual military withdrawal may be construed as a sign of weakness or confirmation that American departure is inevitable. There may, however, be opportunities for US communicators to emphasize elements of this narrative that make it more divisive than the “Great Game” master narrative: specifically, this narrative’s perspective that violence is the only solution to Afghanistan’s problems. A 2010 Asia Foundation survey indicates that 55 percent of Afghans oppose the use of violence by groups such as the Taliban, which presents opportunities for drawing distinctions and creating wedges between beliefs associated with the broadly held “Great Game” master narrative and views espoused by the Taliban.⁴

This master narrative suggests that US messaging designed to counter transnational Islamist extremism may be less effective in countering Taliban messaging. Unlike messaging from transnational *jihadi* groups like Al Qaeda or Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, the “Liberators of Afghanistan” master narrative is intensely nationalistic: expelling foreign forces from Afghanistan is the paramount objective, rather than the establishment of an international Islamic caliphate or attacking or destabilizing Western countries.⁵ Counter-messaging designed to delegitimize

transnational goals such as these may fall short in directly countering the nationalistic messaging featured prominently in this master narrative. As a result, US communicators may need to develop concurrent messaging strategies tailored to address these ideological distinctions in regions where transnational Islamist groups and the Taliban are working in close proximity.

The Taliban's focus on expelling foreign forces could potentially also help US communicators identify counter-messaging opportunities. Because many believe that the Taliban collaborates with both predominantly-Arab extremist groups as well as the Pakistani intelligence services, US communicators could describe the Taliban as contradicting its own messaging by essentially inviting foreigners into Afghan politics and conflicts while claiming that it is trying to expel them. This counter messaging approach could undermine the credibility of Taliban communicators, especially given broadly held animosities toward Pakistan [see also: "Pakistan Take-over"]. However, many Afghans may not consider Pakistani or Arab insurgents as "foreign" in the same manner as western forces, since the former are fellow Muslims who are less likely to be characterized using terms such as "infidel" or "crusader."

SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANALYSTS

Taliban propaganda invokes this master narrative to portray support for the Taliban as the duty of loyal and patriotic Afghans. As a result, how influencers within and outside of the Taliban deviate from or disagree with this narrative may help analysts identify ideological or strategic schisms. Subscription to and perpetuation of this master narrative sets the Taliban apart from transnational *jihadi* groups. Analysts can assess how this master narrative is invoked to investigate ideological differences between the Taliban and these other groups. Stark divergences between this narrative and transnational extremist group messaging could, for instance, be an early indicator of emerging ideological schisms or a breakdown in alliances. Likewise, the extent to which transnational extremist groups deploy the terms and themes central to this narrative may shed light on efforts to court Taliban leaders or sympathizers, or convergence between Taliban ideology and that of particular transnational *jihadi* groups.

The same logic can be applied in analyzing internal Taliban dynamics. With influencers operating at the local level throughout Afghanistan, Taliban messaging tied to this narrative is likely to exhibit variations. These variations could point a variety of changes in Taliban communications efforts, such as lack of coordination between Taliban influencers in different locations, influencer attempts to tailor messaging to local conditions and audiences, or an emerging shift in how the Taliban justifies its efforts to local audiences. Should pronounced differences in how Taliban influencers invoke this narrative persist over time, it could reflect emerging ideological schisms between Taliban influencers.

"Preserving Local Rule"

AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Urban Democrats	Violent Islamists	Ethnic Nationalists
Central Government Supporters	Taliban	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pashtun Nationalists ➤ Tajik Nationalists ➤ Turkic Nationalists ➤ Hazara Nationalists

This narrative resonates with Afghan audience segments that believe in the supremacy of family, sub-tribal, tribal, and ethnic identities above Afghan national identity. The narrative holds wide traction with Afghans who believe that sub-national leaders should hold greater authority within Afghan governance, views that are most present outside of Kabul. Segments subscribing to this narrative include Pashtun Nationalists, Tajik Nationalists, Turkic Nationalists, and Hazara Nationalists.

MASTER NARRATIVE: "PRESERVING LOCAL RULE"

NARRATIVE: For hundreds of years, local and tribal leaders have provided peace and stability to the Afghan people, guided by their own laws and customs. No national government has survived without the support of these leaders. Powerful rulers, however, have also sought to destroy this natural order in pursuit of their own interests. From the British-backed Shah Shuja to the Soviet-backed communists, greed-driven leaders have failed in their efforts to concentrate power in their own hands. Despite the failures of those before them, American-backed leaders today are trying to govern from Kabul: this unnatural rule from afar, however, only breeds corruption, violence, and instability. Afghans should not be bound by what is dictated from Kabul. Instead, they should abide by the local laws and leaders that have served them well for ages. By taking control over their own destiny, Afghans will restore the country's natural order in which families and tribes live peacefully among their own people, undisturbed by self-interested outsiders.

ANALYSIS: Since the end of the nineteenth century, central governance in Afghanistan relied upon the allegiance and support of local leaders, who were rewarded for their loyalty with land and other resources. The expectation that local leaders will provide peace and security in exchange for access to central government resources and protection persists to this day. The "Preserving Local Rule" master narrative reflects a prevalent rejection of the "unnatural" state of centralized governance in Afghanistan without the consent of local leaders. This narrative also reflects a deep seated commitment to independence from overbearing distant rulers. While they may share these core themes, however, local interpretations of this master narrative differ widely across Afghanistan's diverse array of ethnic groups and authority structures. Many Pashtuns, for instance, believe in the importance of tribal allegiances and *Pashtunwali* (traditional Pashtun legal codes) in local governance. Reflecting this, many Pashtun authority structures are built around geographically based tribes and sub-tribes—all impacting convictions and social structures related to authority and shared identity. Tajik interpretations of this narrative, however, are likely to be non-tribal, instead focused on bonds such as extended family structures. With variations such as these, the "Preserving Local Rule" master narrative represents a basic skeleton upon which local communities build a wide range of highly-localized interpretations, carefully tailored to their unique circumstances and culture. Regardless of these variations, the "Preserving Local Rule" master narrative challenges the Kabul government's legitimacy by casting doubt on the central government's claims to authority and ability to provide resources and security to local Afghans, especially in rural areas. [see: "United Afghanistan"].

Afghan influencers invoke themes and concepts featured in this master narrative to position local leaders and authority structures as the most promising avenue toward greater security. In 2010, for instance, Nangarhar governor Gul Agha Sherzai expressed confidence in tribal leaders' ability to reach a truce with the Taliban in southern Afghanistan: "It's possible to have peace in the regions. Bring two members of each tribe and discuss the matter and then give them the duty to talk to the Taliban to convince them to put down their weapons and stop destroying their country."¹ Similarly, the deputy minister of the Kabul government's Directorate for Local Governance said in 2008, "The only way you can bring peace and stability to this country is to revive the traditional rule of people within the community in governance and security."² Statements such as these reinforce views that greater involvement of local leaders is key to establishing peace and security in Afghanistan.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

US communicators may encounter local red lines around issues such as corruption, security, and legal authority in communities where this master narrative is potent. In these areas, otherwise routine policy statements related to the rule of law, security management, and developmental assistance may be misinterpreted as an effort to challenge the authority and autonomy of local leaders or social structures. As a result, statements related to these issues may be best reserved for narrow or private audiences in which US messaging can be accompanied by carefully tailored demonstrations of deference and respect for local customs. Public messaging that directly appeals to this master narrative, however, could adversely impact US relations with the Kabul government since some Afghan government officials equate decentralization with the threat of state disintegration [see: "United Afghanistan"]. Instead, US communicators could appeal to this narrative indirectly by focusing on the broad theme of independence.

By focusing on this core theme—one that also features prominently in American history and beliefs—US communicators could appeal to audiences who subscribe to the “Preserving Local Rule” master narrative while avoiding sensitive specifics regarding who should rule and how.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANALYSTS

Analysts can use this master narrative as an additional lens for identifying and analyzing sub-national governance in Afghanistan in two ways. First, public support for the central government is likely to be weak where support for the “Preserving Local Rule” master narrative is strong, helping analysts assess Kabul’s reach and influence [see also: “United Afghanistan”]. Second, variations in how individual communities adapt and interpret this narrative could be used to better understand variations in local governance structures from community to community. Delineating these highly localized sub-narratives based on the “Preserving Local Rule” master narrative skeleton could help analysts gain further clarity on local political dynamics, jurisdictional authority, influencer motivations, and sub-national governance boundaries. When combined with other sub-national governance variables such as provision of local services and jurisdictional authority, analysts could gain a more complete understanding of where actual on-the-ground power and influence boundaries are drawn and how they shift over time.

Nuances in how local communities interpret this master narrative could also help analysts assess the potential impact of Taliban messaging in a given area. Recognizing the influence of the “Preserving Local Rule” master narrative, Taliban communicators may increasingly promise audiences that local autonomy and traditions will remain undisturbed if the Taliban is restored to power. These persuasion strategies could be effective in undermining support for the central government in areas where the “Preserving Local Rule” master narrative is already strong. On the other hand, the Taliban’s strict brand of Islamism—and the legal and authority structures that go along with it—may meet resistance among communities that adhere strongly to their own variant of the “Preserving Local Rule” master narrative. Communities firmly committed to *Pashtunwali*, for instance, may see the Taliban’s proposal of implementing fundamentalist *Sharia* as yet another manifestation of leaders trying to consolidate power at the expense of local autonomy.²

"United Afghanistan"

AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Urban Democrats	Violent Islamists	Ethnic Nationalists
<p>➤ Central Government Supporters</p>	Taliban	Pashtun Nationalists Tajik Nationalists Turkic Nationalists Hazara Nationalists

Central Government Supporters are largely composed of the urban educated elite, technocrats, and businessmen who support Afghanistan's attempts at centralized government, even if not all support current President Hamid Karzai. Members of this segment generally support maintaining the rule of law through strong national civil society and institutions.

MASTER NARRATIVE: "UNITED AFGHANISTAN"

NARRATIVE: Through the 1950s and 1960s, Afghanistan demonstrated to the world that it was emerging as a modern democratic nation—a peaceful and stable partner guided by a strong central government and an enlightened leader, Zahir Shah. Afghanistan's path toward modernization and democracy, however, was devastated by the Soviet invasion, the civil war, and the Taliban. These years of tragic fragmentation and violence are proof that Afghanistan must be unified under a strong, democratic central government if peace is to be restored. With the Taliban gone, the Afghan people have an opportunity to continue what Zahir Shah started: turning Afghanistan into a peaceful, prosperous, and unified country once again. Afghans must support government institutions if they want to prevent Afghanistan from plunging into civil war, potentially leading to the disintegration of the state. Only through popular support for government leaders and national institutions will the country emerge from the chaos started by the Soviets and become a successful, unified nation.

ANALYSIS: The "United Afghanistan" master narrative underscores two central themes in Central Government Supporters' efforts to rally public support behind the Kabul government: restoring an era of prosperity, and the threat of the state disintegrating. For Afghans who subscribe to this narrative, Mohammed Zahir Shah, the last king of Afghanistan, symbolizes the promise of centralized governance: his reign saw Afghanistan's first "decade of democracy" starting in the mid-1960s, as well as progressive reforms such as founding coeducational institutions and working with foreign governments (including the United States) to update Afghan infrastructure. For many other Afghans, Zahir Shah is viewed as a self-indulgent figure who deserves little credit for the modernization efforts made under his regime. Wider adoption of this master narrative faces significant hurdles. First, two competing master narratives shape the political order in parts of the country where the central government is weak: "Liberators of Afghanistan" calls for the restoration of the Taliban regime, while "Preserving Local Rule" emphasizes the necessity of local, decentralized governance. Second, persistent allegations of corruption undermine greater adoption of this master narrative by exacerbating public doubts about the government's reliability and capacity to rule. As a result of these factors, as well as continued instability, the "United Afghanistan" master narrative espoused by Central Government Supporters remains embattled.

Influencers invoking this master narrative point to symbolic leaders from Afghanistan's era of prosperity in order to capitalize on nostalgia for the time before the Soviet invasion. Zahir Shah, for instance, was welcomed back to Afghanistan in 2002 after decades of exile to great fanfare from Central Government Supporters. Then-interim leader Hamid Karzai stated, "The new Afghanistan welcomes all its sons, including the former king of Afghanistan, a fatherly figure, a symbol of unity."¹ Zahir Shah was later formally recognized as the "Father of the Nation" in the Afghan constitution.² Afghan leaders turn to these symbolic figures in order to remind Afghan audiences of better times and associate those times with broad Afghan unity behind a strong central government.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

The "United Afghanistan" master narrative is aligned with US objectives for securing a stable and effective Afghan government, and widespread public support for this narrative could result in greater unity and cooperation in achieving that goal. US efforts to reinforce or support this narrative, however, may lead to mixed outcomes for US communicators given that the Afghan central government is at the heart of persistent controversy and debate in Afghanistan. While US messaging that invokes the "United Afghanistan" master narrative may resonate with audiences in Kabul, this messaging may also result in unpredictable public reactions in locations where competing master narratives are potent. For instance, those who subscribe to the "Preserving Local Rule" master narrative may interpret US messaging invoking the "United Afghanistan" master narrative as an indication that the United States does not understand or respect local laws and customs. Those who subscribe to the "Right to Rule" narrative, which characterizes Pashtuns as the rightful leaders of Afghanistan, may interpret similar messaging as evidence of the United States participating in a campaign to repress Pashtun authority in the country.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANALYSTS

In Afghanistan's dynamic political environment, influencers may change their stance regarding centralized governance over time, resulting in changing levels of support for the Kabul government. The extent to which influencer messaging aligns with, rejects, or avoids this master narrative can be used to assess how these dynamics evolve and to better understand influencer motives. On the one hand, changes in influencer messaging that increasingly endorse this master narrative may reflect an increased willingness to cooperate with central government officials and initiatives. On the other hand, messaging that rejects this master narrative may reflect efforts to consolidate power locally or to undermine political rivals affiliated with the central government. Finally, the extent to which influencers avoid this master narrative may be telling for analysts, as this avoidance may indicate that influencers do not want to be associated with unpopular central government policies or actions, even if they do not want to actively speak out against the government.

The success of this narrative in gaining ground over competing narratives could provide analysts with an additional lens for assessing the central government's popularity, hold on power, and its ongoing conflict with the Taliban. The absence or weakness of the central government in a given area is likely to be reflected in the local narrative landscape: where local audiences find the "United Afghanistan" narrative unappealing or objectionable, the "Liberators of Afghanistan" or "Preserving Local Rule" master narratives are likely to "fill the void" left by the lack of government influence or public support. In these areas, audiences may be more receptive to messaging from local leaders or susceptible to threats from the Taliban. On the other hand, identifying areas where both the "Liberators of Afghanistan" and "Preserving Local Rule" narrative are waning may help analysts pinpoint where central government messaging is most effective or where the application of such messaging might have heightened potential to sway local audiences.

"Pakistan Takeover"

AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Urban Democrats	Violent Islamists	Ethnic Nationalists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Central Government Supporters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taliban 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pashtun Nationalists ➤ Tajik Nationalists ➤ Turkic Nationalists ➤ Hazara Nationalists

This master narrative resonates broadly across Afghan audience segments. It reflects historically tense or hostile Afghanistan-Pakistan relations that date back to Pakistan's founding. The Afghan Taliban are a notable exception, as Pakistan formally supported the Taliban before 2001, and many observers believe that today the Taliban use Pakistani territory as a staging area for continuing their insurgency, making open criticism of Pakistan less tenable.

MASTER NARRATIVE: "PAKISTAN TAKEOVER"

NARRATIVE: The Afghan people have repelled outside invaders for centuries, successfully fighting off the British Empire and the Soviets. Afghanistan faced a new kind of enemy when the British created Pakistan in 1947, one bent on controlling Afghanistan by sowing turmoil through secretive plots against the Afghan people. Pakistan armed and trained violent extremists and sent them across the border to destabilize Afghanistan after the Soviets left. In the 1990s, Pakistan supported the Taliban government, strengthening Pakistan's foothold at the expense of Afghan peace and development. Today, Pakistan is waiting for an opportunity to retake control of the country, playing an elaborate game in which it takes money from the United States with one hand and arms extremists with the other. Pakistan wants to exploit Afghanistan economically, meddle in its domestic affairs, and prevent it from gaining the stability it needs to prosper. They will undoubtedly move quickly to assert their power in Afghanistan once again when American forces leave. To protect the country's security and independence, Afghans must be vigilant against the plots of Pakistan and its ISI agents. Only by exposing and thwarting these conspiracies will Afghanistan finally be able to achieve the stability needed for its economy and society to flourish.

ANALYSIS: This master narrative is a modern manifestation of deeper historical grievances dating back to the nineteenth century. Many Afghans believe that the Pashtun territory of Pakistan is a natural extension of the Afghan state, a portion of "Greater Afghanistan" severed by British colonial authorities. As a result, interstate animosities between Afghanistan and Pakistan date back to Pakistan's founding in 1947, when the Durand Line became Pakistan's formal border and divided the Pashtun population across two states despite Afghan objections. Many Afghans believe Pakistan's founding came at Afghanistan's expense. This narrative supports a wide range of possible explanations for why Pakistan allegedly conspires against Afghanistan today. First, this narrative accuses Pakistan of engaging in deliberate economic exploitation—for instance, by barring access to ocean trade routes and flooding the Afghan market with cheap goods. Second, it is widely held that Pakistan covertly supports the Taliban in an effort to undermine Afghanistan's security, thereby keeping Afghanistan weak while ensuring that the United States continues to provide Pakistan with military and financial aid.^{1,2} Third, some believe that Pakistan is motivated by its rivalry with India because destabilizing Afghanistan could prevent India from expanding its influence west of Pakistan.³ This deeply entrenched hostility and suspicion also impacts perceptions of the United States, which is often considered guilty by association due to its ties with Pakistan. To many who subscribe to the "Pakistan Takeover" master narrative, the United States either deliberately or naïvely plays along with Pakistan's "double game" in which Pakistan simultaneously maintains close ties with both the United States and the Taliban.

Key influencers invoking this narrative point to Pakistani plots as the cause of a long list of Afghan problems. Afghan editorials routinely lament these longstanding grievances: as one editorial described it, Pakistan's actions are the "old pain of the Afghan nation."⁴ These grievances are aired in political dialogue as well: in 2010 the spokesman for President Hamid Karzai noted that Pakistan instigates insecurity and supports terrorist activities in Afghanistan, instead of playing an effective role in bringing peace to Afghanistan.⁵

SIGNIFICANCE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

This narrative effectively brands any group or actor associated with Pakistan as untrustworthy, and a possible risk to Afghan sovereignty. Therefore, Afghan audiences who subscribe to this narrative may interpret US messages about a close US-Pakistan relationship as tacit support for Pakistani efforts to undermine the stability of Afghanistan. Afghan wariness of US support for Pakistan was evident in 2009, when a member of the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that the US military had ample proof that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) funds and supports Taliban and other insurgent activity in the region, and thus the United States is partly to blame for the armed conflict.⁶ US communicators should expect any messaging related to Pakistan to receive considerable scrutiny from Afghan audiences, many of whom feel that the United States is not adequately addressing their concerns and warnings regarding Pakistan. Animosity toward Pakistan may also make Afghan audiences sensitive to messaging that suggests the United States considers the two countries to be similar or connected. As a result, Afghan audiences may react negatively to terms such as "AfPak" or policy statements that treat the two countries as a regional block. Instead, US communicators may want to exercise added caution by clearly outlining how the United States sees the two countries as distinct and distinguishable.

Due to regional politics and rivalry, messaging related to this master narrative presents US communicators with complex challenges beyond Afghanistan's borders. Messaging from the United States that suggests the Taliban is heavily influenced by the Pakistani government may resonate and diminish the credibility of the Taliban with Afghan audiences. However, this resonance may come at the cost of reinforcing Pakistani master narratives which hold that the United States is plotting to destabilize Pakistan and tarnish its reputation [see, for instance: "The US Plot Against Pakistan" in the Pakistan Master Narratives Report]. Implications such as these underscore the importance of messaging coordination, distinguishing between public and private communications, and understanding the "system" of master narratives operating in the region.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANALYSTS

The "Pakistan Takeover" narrative is often used to call into question the United States' reliability as a partner in establishing peace and stability in Afghanistan. Analysts can assess how the United States is incorporated into public conversations related to the "Pakistan Takeover" narrative to better understand the current state of Afghan perceptions of the United States and its actions and policies. For instance, several daily newspapers in Afghanistan welcomed US drone strikes on Pakistani soil in 2010, stating that the strikes constituted US acknowledgment of Taliban hideouts in Pakistan's tribal regions.⁷ On the other hand, there is suspicion toward US actions because adherents to this narrative believe Pakistan foments instability in Afghanistan in order to maintain US financial aid and military assistance. At any given time, the extent to which the United States is associated with public anxieties and hostilities directed at Pakistan may impact Afghan calculations about the United States' trustworthiness. These calculations could directly impact the willingness of Afghan audiences and influencers to support new policies or operations.

Analysts can also use this narrative to gauge Afghan perceptions of the effectiveness of their elected officials. Public support for the "Pakistan Takeover" narrative provides Afghan leaders with a scapegoat for deflecting responsibility for persistent domestic instability. Because support for this master narrative is broad and largely stable, a decline in public willingness to accept "blame Pakistan" messaging as a legitimate explanation for ineffective governance may signify heightened support for holding Afghan leaders accountable for continued instability and lack of development.

"Right to Rule"

AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Urban Democrats

Central Government
Supporters

Violent Islamists

➤ Taliban

Ethnic Nationalists

➤ Pashtun Nationalists

Tajik Nationalists

Turkic Nationalists

Hazara Nationalists

The narrative below resonates with two audience segments: Pashtun Nationalists and the Taliban. While Pashtuns are spread throughout Afghanistan, nationalism is more pervasive in the areas of greatest Pashtun concentration, primarily in southern and eastern Afghanistan. The "Right to Rule" master narrative reflects views held by staunch Pashtun Nationalists, a vocal subset of Afghanistan's large Pashtun population. The predominantly-Pashtun Taliban also uses this narrative when appealing to Pashtun audiences.

MASTER NARRATIVE: "RIGHT TO RULE"

NARRATIVE: The Pashtuns have called Afghanistan home for thousands of years, long before any other peoples came to the land, making them the only true Afghans. Afghan and Pashtun identity are inseparable: the Pashtuns have always been Afghanistan's source of strength and independence by resisting foreign invaders and uniting the Afghan people. Great Pashtun leaders used their power wisely to bring prosperity and security to Afghanistan. This power, however, instilled jealousy and anger among the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, and Hazaras, all of whom have sought to repress Pashtuns. These minorities used the US invasion in 2001 to collaborate with foreign invaders against the Pashtuns: arming themselves, securing positions of power, and repressing Pashtun language and culture while a war was declared against Pashtuns on both sides of the border. Today, these minorities control the Kabul government and receive special treatment from both the government and the Americans, while Pashtuns bear the brunt of the war's devastation. Yet Afghanistan will always be the land of the Pashtuns, and Pashtuns throughout Afghanistan must demand that the power they deserve is restored, that their culture is respected, and that they are not forced to bow to the whims of the minorities who work against them. Only through the restoration of natural Pashtun rule can Afghanistan hope for peace and prosperity.

ANALYSIS: By framing Pashtuns as superior to other ethnic groups and historically entitled to authority in Afghanistan, this master narrative can fuel inter-ethnic tensions, impact voter behavior, and color influencer competition. This narrative's emphasis on Pashtun rule has deep historical roots: Pashtun settlements in Afghanistan date back to the seventh century, earlier than any other ethnic group in the country.¹ Prior to Soviet incursions into Afghanistan in the 1970s, the country was largely ruled by Pashtun leaders for over three-hundred years. Even the name Afghanistan is believed by many to mean "land of the Pashtuns," further demonstrating how many believe that Afghan and Pashtun history and identity are inseparable. The "Right to Rule" master narrative draws on ethnic tensions that have existed for generations, and reflects a sentiment shared by many Pashtun Nationalists that other groups conspire against their people. These sentiments became acute in the wake of the 2001 US invasion, conducted with the support of the Tajik- and Uzbek-led Northern Alliance. The subsequent installation of a new government in which minorities hold powerful posts is seen as a usurpation of Pashtun power and revenge against Afghanistan's historical rulers. Subscribers to this master narrative continue to point to grievances with the government—including disproportionately low Pashtun representation in Parliament and the Afghan National Army and discrimination in the education system—as evidence that minorities dominate the Kabul government with American support. As a group that is both predominantly Pashtun and staunchly nationalist, the Taliban support this narrative as well. However, the Taliban also advocate reestablishing an Islamist state whereas demands for a particular style of governance are largely absent from the "Right to Rule" master narrative [see: "Liberators of Afghanistan"]. As a result, the "Right to Rule" master narrative does not directly compete with other master narratives explicitly concerned with Afghan governance structures.

Pashtun influencers invoke this narrative's themes of victimization and repression in order to mobilize Pashtun audiences against actors they accuse of anti-Pashtun discrimination. Marking the seventh anniversary of the US-led invasion, insurgent leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar stated, "In a government influenced by America, [Pashtuns'] lands, homes and pastures have been grabbed by northern alliance criminals who want to provoke language and tribal discrimination against them."² This master narrative encourages Pashtun Nationalists to resist the Afghan government and army, instead calling for them to support leaders—sometimes including insurgents—who promise to restore Pashtun authority.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

The ethnic tensions underlying this master narrative highlight the challenging balancing act confronting US communicators operating in the region. On the one hand, encouraging interethnic cooperation may run afoul of subscribers to this narrative who believe that ethnic minorities receive preferential treatment. On the other hand, acknowledging or praising Pashtun exceptionalism may alienate Tajik, Uzbek, and other audiences who associate Pashtun rule with the Taliban. These challenges will likely be most pronounced when speaking to large or diverse public audiences, and can impact how audiences respond to particular themes or policy statements. Thematically, subscribers to this narrative may interpret communicators extolling American principles, such as multiculturalism and pluralism, as euphemisms for the United States backing expanded influence of Tajiks and other minorities. Similar misinterpretations of US messaging could occur in response to policy statements related to seemingly innocuous issues such as human rights and democratization.

This narrative also impacts how Pashtun Nationalists understand messaging and statements concerning US relations with the Kabul government. Beliefs among many Pashtun Nationalists that Tajiks and Uzbeks control the Afghan government suggest that messaging emphasizing US support for Kabul may be misconstrued as evidence that the United States is complicit in efforts to discriminate against Pashtuns. Such beliefs not only cast doubt on the legitimacy of the Kabul government, but also could impact Pashtun willingness to cooperate with US forces.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANALYSTS

This master narrative remains a potent device for inspiring nationalistic sentiments, which can spill over into interethnic conflict. Because this narrative is openly hostile to non-Pashtun minorities in Afghanistan, a surge in use of this narrative could be a precursor to heightened ethnic tensions or instability. These tensions are likely to be most pronounced in areas where Pashtuns and other ethnic groups live in close proximity. For example, after violence erupted between Kuchi Pashtuns and Hazaras in Wardak province in May 2010, non-Pashtun members of parliament accused President Karzai of enflaming ethnic tensions by catering to views embedded in this master narrative, such as Pashtun entitlement and the unfair empowerment of other ethnic groups.³ The extent to which the "Right to Rule" master narrative resonates with audiences located in areas with mixed ethnic populations could help analysts better assess the likelihood of interethnic violence.

Influencer persuasion strategies related to this narrative may also be a source of analytic insight for understanding electoral dynamics. For many, this master narrative instills a belief that only Pashtun politicians can legitimately hold power in Afghanistan, making a particular candidate's claim to Pashtun identity and heritage an important factor in whether voters will support him. In areas where the "Right to Rule" master narrative is potent, a candidate's ability to depict himself as "Pashtun first" could impact his electability. Candidates respond to this with subtle strategies such as wearing either traditional Pashtun dress or Western-style suits while campaigning depending on the ethnic composition of the audience.⁴ The ability of candidates and influencers to successfully invoke the "Right to Rule" master narrative could give analysts deeper insights into electoral outcomes and public support for Afghan officials more broadly.



Appendix & Sourcing



Afghanistan Audience Segmentation

Many audience segments in Afghanistan fundamentally differ in their understanding of individual and national identity, which influences their views on how the country should be governed.

URBAN DEMOCRATS

Central Government Supporters

This segment believes that the success of Afghanistan's future lies in a strong national government and identity that supersedes regionalism and ethnic identity. Demographically and ethnically diverse, this segment believes that the Afghan government should represent a balance of Afghanistan's ethnicities. This segment is largely composed of the urban educated elite, technocrats, and businessmen who support Afghanistan's ongoing efforts to implement centralized governance, even if not all support the Karzai administration. This segment's primary goal is to maintain the rule of law through a strong civil society, including an independent Parliament and judiciary, and advocate for women's rights. They view the rise of the Taliban as the greatest threat to Afghanistan, and also fear that decentralized power could undermine the state's integrity and unity. This segment believes that the Afghan government and people must work with a variety of actors, including the United States, to bring security and stability to the country and prevent interethnic or sectarian violence.

VIOLENT ISLAMISTS

Taliban

Concentrated mainly in the southeastern part of Afghanistan, the Taliban want to institute a strict form of Sharia into formal Afghan law. Ultimately, however, the Taliban are foremost a nationalistic group focused on expelling foreign "occupiers." Born out of a student movement in the conservative *madrassas* in rural Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Taliban influence significant portions of predominantly-Pashtun areas, often through coercion or violence. Though they reject the American-supported government in Afghanistan, they do believe that it is the state's responsibility to provide a basic social safety net to the people living under their control, and they have instituted sub-national governance structures in territory they control. Additionally, the Taliban sometimes implement their policies through traditional tribal *shuras* and *jirgas* that still maintain weight within the community.

ETHNIC NATIONALISTS

Pashtun Nationalists

While dispersed throughout the country's urban and rural areas, Pashtun Nationalists are a narrow but vocal subset of the Afghan Pashtun population. Pashtun Nationalists believe that they are the only true Afghans because they are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan and because their presence there dates back centuries. As a result, they associate more strongly with their Pashtun identity than a national Afghan identity that includes other ethnic groups; this historical heritage also informs their perception of their own ethnic superiority. Some

Pashtun Nationalists believe in the creation of a separate Pashtunistan based on Pashtun identity and culture, and a minority of this group conduct violent campaigns to restore this nation. Due to shared ethnicity, Pashtun Nationalists may make short term alliances with the Taliban if they see it in their favor.

Tajik Nationalists

Despite the fact that Tajiks have a large role in the Afghan government, some nationalists would like to see the group given greater autonomy as they believe that Pashtuns are interested only in dominating other ethnic groups and will never allow a fully equal society in Afghanistan. Nationalistic sentiments are stronger among Tajiks in northern Afghanistan than among Tajiks in Kabul, who are well-represented in the government and military. Northern Tajik nationalists were one of the dominant factions of the Northern Alliance that opposed the Taliban and they remain wary of the motives of southern Afghans and are particularly sensitive to perceptions of Pashtun superiority. While they hold positive associations toward the United States for enabling the overthrow of the Taliban and the empowerment of the Tajiks within the national government, they are wary of US motives in the region and relations with President Karzai, who they believe acts based on the interest of his fellow Pashtuns.

Turkic Nationalists

This segment consists of Uzbeks and Turkmen, who share Turkic ethnicity and languages and associate more closely with fellow Uzbeks/Turkmen than other Afghans. They primarily occupy the northern agricultural region of Afghanistan, across the border from their kin in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, with whom they maintain close relations. They largely make their living from herding and textiles, which has allowed them to be self-sufficient. This economic prowess has enabled Turkic Nationalists to advocate for greater autonomy and other political advantages, such as occupying senior positions in various Afghan governments and the civil service. They desire to continue this autonomy, since they view themselves as ethnically and linguistically distinct from the rest of Afghanistan. In order to achieve this autonomy, Turkic nationalists desire to work within the government but also support the *Junbish-e* political faction.

Hazara Nationalists

This segment represents Hazaras who believe that as a historically downtrodden group, they deserve greater autonomy from governance structures led by ethnic groups like Pashtuns and Tajiks. The Hazaras have often faced oppression and discrimination at the hands of other ethnic groups as a result of their race and Shi'a religion. The largest Shi'a group in Afghanistan, Hazaras are religiously related to Iranians, and their language, Hazagari, is a form of Persian. Concentrated in central Afghanistan, Hazaras have traditionally received less aid and suffer from great poverty. As a result, many Hazaras have migrated to the city where they often work in menial jobs. They desire better education, greater economic opportunities, and respite from anti-Shi'a hostilities.

Sources

AFGHANISTAN AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION

Central Government Supporters

- Giles Dorrnsoro discusses Kabul government supporters' wary attitudes towards the US but the belief that central government is key both to retaining power and a successful Afghanistan. "Karzai Comes to Washington," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 11 May 2010: <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=40779>; "Rising Tensions in Afghanistan: Dispatch from Kandahar," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 18 August 2009: <http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=23608>.
- Selig Harrison notes that many Tajiks are supportive of the central government because they are well-represented in the civil and security services. "Afghanistan's Tyranny of the Minority," *New York Times*. 17 August 2009: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/17/opinion/17harrison.html>.
- Pratap Chatterjee discusses how corruption plays a key role in central government supporters' gaining and retaining power. "Afghanistan runs on well-oiled wheels," *Asia Times*. 19 November 2009: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/KK19Df01.html.

Pashtun Nationalists

- Selig Harrison describes the Pashtun Nationalists' political grievances over the Tajiks' perceived "disproportionate" power. "Ethnic hostility is a big, maybe the biggest, part of the Afghan war," *The Globe and Mail*. 2 November 2009: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/opinions/ethnic-hostility-is-a-big-maybe-the-biggest-part-of-the-afghan-war/article1346221>; "Afghanistan's Tyranny of the Minority," *New York Times*. 17 August 2009: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/17/opinion/17harrison.html>; "Rising Tensions in Afghanistan: Dispatch from Kandahar," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 18 August 2009: <http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=23608>.
- Pashtun Nationalists believe they have a natural right to Pashtunistan that was violated by the 1893 Durand Line border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. "Afghanistan's Troubled Border," *Newsweek*. 2 December 2007: <http://www.newsweek.com/2007/12/01/no-man-s-land.html>; "The Troubled Afghan-Pakistani Border," Council on Foreign Relations. 20 March 2009: http://www.cfr.org/publication/14905/troubled_afghanpakistani_border.html; "The Pashtun Time Bomb," *New York Times*. 1 August 2007: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/01/opinion/01iht-edharrison.1.6936601.html>.

Taliban

- For an overview of the Taliban and their attitudes toward the United States and Afghan governance, see: "The Taliban in Afghanistan," Council on Foreign Relations. 3 August 2009: http://www.cfr.org/publication/10551/taliban_in_afghanistan.html; "Who are the Taliban?" *BBC News*. 1 October 2010: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1549285.stm; "Behind the Taliban's Resurgence in Afghanistan," *Time*. 16 September 2009: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1923303,00.html#ixzz0y7ajkqi5>.
- For more on the Taliban, including the socio-economic profile of their members and their relations with the Al Qaeda network, see: "Who are the Taliban?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 22 October 2009: <http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=24029>.

Tajik Nationalists

- The political grievances and issues of the Tajiks generally revolve around greater recognition and rights. "Assessment for Tajiks in Afghanistan," UNHCR. 31 December 2003: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,MARF,AFG,4562d8cf2,469f3a52b,0.html>.
- Giles Dorrnsoro discusses Tajik leadership in the Afghan government and its alienating effect on Pashtuns. "Rising Tensions in Afghanistan: Dispatch from Kandahar," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 18 August 2009: <http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=23608>.
- Selig Harrison describes how the Tajiks hold a number of the senior government and military spots, potentially leading to conflict with the Pashtuns and other ethnicities. "Afghanistan's Tyranny of the Minority," *New York Times*. 17 August 2009: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/17/opinion/17harrison.html>.

Turkic Nationalists

- For a description of the Uzbeks and Turkmen people, see: Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of its People and Politics*. Harper Perennial. 2002. Print; Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton University Press. 2010. Print.
- A UNHCR report outlines the status of Uzbeks in Afghanistan, highlighting that they enjoy relative autonomy but have clashed with Pashtuns in the past. “Assessment for Uzbeks in Afghanistan,” UNHCR. 31 December 2003: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher,MARP,COUNTRYREP,AFG,469f3a521d,0.html>.
- A 2009 report indicates rising tensions between Uzbek and Turkmen militants on one side, and Taliban forces on the other. “Rising Tensions in Afghanistan: Dispatch from Kandahar,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 18 August 2009: <http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=23608>.

Hazara Nationalists

- For a description of the historical oppression and discrimination that Hazaras have faced at the hands of other Afghan ethnicities, see: Christina Lamb, *The Sewing Circles of Herat*. Perennial. 2002. Print; Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of its People and Politics*. Harper Perennial. 2002. Print.
- Hazara Nationalists’ modern political objectives include greater autonomy and better access to education. “Hazaras Hustle to Head of Class in Afghanistan,” *New York Times*. 4 January 2010: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/04/world/asia/04hazaras.html?pagewanted=all>; “Assessment for Hazaras in Afghanistan,” UNHCR. 31 December 2003: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher,MARP,COUNTRYREP,AFG,469f3a510,0.html>

“THE GREAT GAME”

Key Phrases, Symbols, or Images

- **“The Great Game”**: Term referring to the 19th century rivalry between the British and Russian Empires where the British used Afghanistan as a buffer state to repel Russian advances into British India. More generally, the term refers to the concept of foreign powers competing for control of Afghanistan due to its strategic location in Central Asia.
- **Anglo-Afghan Wars**: Two wars fought in the 19th century between the British Empire and native Afghans, seen as a symbol of Afghan resistance to foreign empires that continues to the present day.
- **“Graveyard of Empires”**: Nickname for Afghanistan referring to Afghans’ defeat of the British Empire in the 19th century and the Soviet Union in the 1980s.
- **“Heart of Asia”**: Term for Afghanistan, from a poem by Lahori poet Muhammad Iqbal, that describes Afghanistan’s location at the center of Asia and explains why foreign nations have had an interest in occupying it. Although Iqbal (known as “Iqbal of Lahore”) was from Pakistan, his works are widely known in Afghanistan. In addition, a contemporary patriotic song describes Afghanistan as the “soul in the body of Asia” and “the storm in the ocean of Asia.”
- **Nejat**: Meaning salvation or liberation, this term is used to describe how Afghan warriors have freed the people from foreign occupation.
- **Esteqlal**: Meaning independence—Afghans are firmly committed to the notion that they remain a free people, unencumbered by the burdens of overbearing foreign or domestic leaders, and free to shape their own destiny.
- **Ghazi**: A term of praise used to describe those who participated in past jihads (such as that against the Soviets), celebrating their bravery and contribution to Afghan independence.

- **Massacre of Elphinstone's Army/"Remnants of an Army":** Refers to the 1842 battle between British and Afghan forces during the First Anglo-Afghan War. When British forces moved from Kabul to a garrison at Jalalabad, they were soundly defeated by Afghan forces; in all, over 16,000 British forces were killed or captured. William Brydon, an assistant surgeon in the army, was the only Briton to escape the massacre; the painting "Remnants of an Army," showing Brydon as the only retreating soldier, is a symbol of Afghan resistance to foreign armies. (image via wikimedia.org)



Quotations

1. "Media Environment Guide: Afghanistan," *BBC Monitoring* via www.opensource.gov. 19 May 2009: IAP20090519950070.
2. "Afghanistan Media Survey," BBC Trust. 2007: http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/review_report_research/ar2007_08/afghanistan_research.pdf.
3. "Afghanistan – Karzai Again Intensifies Anti-US Rhetoric," *OSC Analysis* via www.opensource.gov. 8 October 2010: SAF20101008497001.
4. "Karzai slams West's record in Afghanistan," *Tolo TV* via www.opensource.gov. 2 October 2010: SAP20101002950050.
5. "U.S. now in Afghanistan as long as Soviets were," *Los Angeles Times*. 27 November 2010: <http://articles.latimes.com/print/2010/nov/27/world/la-fg-afghanistan-russia-20101127>.
6. "Afghanistan: The Relationship Gap," International Council on Security and Development. July 2010: http://www.icosgroup.net/documents/afghanistan_relationship_gap.pdf.

Sources

Audience Segment

- The Great Game master narrative was confirmed as one of the most deeply and widely held narratives across Afghan audience segments in interviews with Afghanistan experts. Monitor 360 interviews with Ben Sheppard (Potomac Institute for Policy Studies), 17 September 2010; Gretchen Peters (Author, *Seeds of Terror*), 22 September 2010; Anna Elliot (Bamyan Media), 24 September 2010; Ahmad Idrees Rahmani (Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies), 29 September 2010; Scott Worden (United States Institute of Peace), 23 November 2010; Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- Ahmad Idrees Rahmani of the Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies describes the Great Game narrative as so deeply held by Afghan audiences that most people accept it as a given and do not challenge it analytically. According to Rahmani, the narrative is rooted in two main beliefs: that Afghanistan is attractive for invasion because of its location and resources, and that despite many attempts no foreigner has ever conquered Afghanistan. Rahmani refers to the term "graveyard of empires" as a point of pride for Afghan audiences. Monitor 360 interview with Ahmad Idrees Rahmani (Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies), 29 September 2010.
- In a Monitor 360 interview, Ben Sheppard described the Afghan perceptions instilled by the Great Game narrative. According to Sheppard, this narrative instills a belief that foreigners are only interested in Afghanistan in the short term and only look out for their own interests. Monitor 360 interview with Ben Sheppard (Potomac Institute for Policy Studies), 17 September 2010.

- A 2008 BBC report points out that anti-British sentiment is not limited to the Taliban in Afghanistan. The report describes Afghans more broadly as knowing “the stories of subterfuge and betrayal that accompanied this Great Game as British and Russian empires fought for influence in Afghanistan.” The report also describes historical memory of the Great Game as having a powerful impact on the present, describing Afghanistan as “a place where rumour, conspiracy theory and paranoia make a heady cocktail.” “Why British-Afghan ties have hit a low,” *BBC News*. 6 February 2008: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7231083.stm.

Master Narrative

- The Great Game narrative was described by a number of Afghanistan experts as a history of attempted occupation by outside forces. Monitor 360 interviews with Ben Sheppard (Potomac Institute for Policy Studies), 22 September 2010; Gretchen Peters (Author, *Seeds of Terror*), 22 September 2010; Selig Harrison (Center for International Policy), 23 November 2010; Matt Waldman (London School of Economics), 23 November 2010; Scott Worden (United States Institute of Peace), 23 November 2010; Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- The belief that Afghanistan has never been conquered was described as a pervasive myth by Afghanistan expert Gretchen Peters. The narrative holds that Afghanistan has successfully expelled both British and Russian forces and will do the same to US forces, but ignores US support for *mujahideen* operations against the Soviet Union. Monitor 360 interview with Gretchen Peters (Author, *Seeds of Terror*), 22 September 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Ahmad Idrees Rahmani describes Afghanistan’s history of being invaded by foreigners as stretching back to Alexander the Great, and including invasions by the Persian Empire, Ghenghis Khan, and the Ottoman Empire before the commonly-termed Great Game period of the British and Russian Empires. Monitor 360 interview with Ahmad Idrees Rahmani (Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies), 29 September 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Barmak Pazhwak said in a Monitor 360 interview that Afghans have constructed the idea of a Great Game narrative in the past century, but that in retelling the narrative, they examine the past five thousand years of Afghan history through the lens of foreign invasion. Monitor 360 interview with Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- Scott Worden of the United States Institute of Peace attributes conspiracy theories regarding the United States to the Great Game master narrative. According to Worden, the United States is perceived as the world’s strongest superpower that could easily defeat the Taliban insurgency. According to believers of this narrative, the continued presence of the Taliban is proof that the United States is uninterested in defeating the movement and keeps the Taliban operating to justify continued presence in Afghanistan. Monitor 360 interview with Scott Worden (United States Institute of Peace), 23 November 2010.
- In his history of Afghanistan, Thomas Barfield describes Afghanistan’s experience with the Great Game and its effect on Afghan rulers’ perceptions of foreign powers: “They were acutely aware that they lived in a world where their country’s primary interests were always at the bottom of someone else’s agenda... Yet time and time again, Afghanistan returned to the world stage with an importance that always belied this gloss and generated the revenue it was seeking.” Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton University Press. 2009. Print. Pp. 311-12.
- In the prologue to his history of the Great Game’s competition between the British and Russian Empires, Peter Hopkirk points out that the fundamental foreign interests and rivalries that led to conflict in Afghanistan throughout the 19th century continue to the present: “The headlines of today are often indistinguishable from the painful lessons of the past. Had the Russians in December 1979 remembered Britain’s unhappy experiences in Afghanistan in 1842, in not dissimilar circumstances, then they might not have fallen into the same terrible trap, thereby sparing some 15,000 young Russian lives, not to mention untold numbers of innocent Afghan victims. The Afghans, Moscow found out too late, were an unbeatable foe... Some would maintain that the Great Game never really ended, and that it was merely the forerunner of the Cold War of our own times, fueled by the same fears, suspicions and misunderstandings.” Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game*. Kodansha International. 1994. Print. Pp. 7-8.
- The Great Game of the 19th century was a result of overlap in imperial spheres of influence between the British Empire and Russian Empire. The British held the Indian subcontinent while Russians controlled Central Asian territory north of India. The area of overlap was centered on Afghanistan. The British invaded Afghanistan in 1839 and fought the First Anglo-Afghan War as a way to prevent Russian expansion. Following two wars and conflict between the two empires, Afghanistan gained its independence in 1919. “The Troubled Afghan-Pakistani Border,” Council on Foreign Relations. 20 March 2009: http://www.cfr.org/publication/14905/troubled_afghanpakistani_border.html.

- Ethnologist Bern Glatzer, in a 2008 interview, said that Afghanistan has always been a country that attracts foreign visitors—including Alexander the Great, Ghenghis Khan, and Marco Polo—due to its strategic location along trade routes. Glatzer mentioned that Afghans are welcoming toward visitors but can get “extremely hostile” when they believe that foreigners are attempting to occupy their land or take advantage of their hospitality, citing the British Empire and the Soviet occupation as two examples. According to Glatzer, “No one has managed yet to exploit, manipulate or to impose an alien ideology on them.” “How do Afghans tick?” Afghanistan Analysts Network. 16 December 2009: <http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=506>.
- The British Ministry of Defence organized a private viewing of “The Great Game,” a series of twelve plays set over the course of 150 years of British and American involvement in Afghanistan. In a play set during the civil war following the Soviet withdrawal, former president Mohammad Najibullah says of foreigners’ history in Afghanistan, “My country has been imagined enough. My country is the creation of foreign imaginings.” “War, culture, and ‘the great game,’” *Foreign Policy*. 14 September 2010: http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/09/14/war_culture_and_the_great_game.
- While US and NATO forces are currently present in Afghanistan, the New Great Game is not limited to Western powers. The People’s Republic of China, and its fellow members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, are also taking an active interest in Central Asian affairs and security due to the energy interests in the region. “The New Great Game,” *Forbes*. 16 July 2009: <http://www.forbes.com/2009/07/15/uighurs-china-great-game-russia-al-qaeda-opinions-contributors-charles-hill.html>.
- The US is described as having taken over the role of the British in the modern variant on the Great Game, with the Russians still playing an important role, and new regional powers China, Iran, Turkey, India, and Pakistan entering the arena. “The new Great Game,” *The Guardian*. 20 October 2003: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2003/oct/20/oil>; “India must master the great game,” *Wall Street Journal*. 2 September 2010: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703882304575464904189082686.html>.
- Militant Gulbuddin Hekmatyar invoked the steadfastness of the Afghan people in resisting foreign occupation in a 2009 statement, saying, “Our determination is firm and we are war-hardened and hardships-tested people. We are ready for a prolonged war. You must know that you have no option of solution except withdrawal.” “Hekmatyar’s statement on the eighth anniversary of American attack on Afghanistan,” Dawat Independent Media Center. 10 June 2009: <http://www.dawatfreemedia.org/english/index.php?mod=article&cat=Articles&article=102>.

Significance for Strategic Communicators

- According to Barmak Pazhwak of the United States Institute of Peace, the idea of the United States “winning hearts and minds” in Afghanistan does not make sense, because the only people to historically win the hearts and minds of Afghans in the past have been Afghan rulers, not foreigners. Monitor 360 interview with Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- In a Monitor 360 interview, Rebecca Zimmerman of RAND Corporation described how US messaging that supports the Kabul government is often misconstrued as self-interest. According to Zimmerman there is a pervasive sense that Americans are more interested in providing for themselves than for the Afghan people. Monitor 360 interview with Rebecca Zimmerman (RAND Corporation), 24 November 2010.
- Ahmad Idrees Rahmani of the Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies describes two primary behaviors instilled by this narrative: disengagement from US military efforts and support for the Taliban. Monitor 360 interview with Ahmad Idrees Rahmani (Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies), 29 September 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Gretchen Peters describes the Taliban’s invocation of the narrative to rally resistance to foreign soldiers. According to Peters, the Afghan Taliban have a narrative that blends nationalism with optimism about their ability to expel foreigners: “You’ll hear that ‘the great Afghan nation has never been conquered.’ They bang on this stuff in their rhetoric.” Monitor 360 interview with Gretchen Peters (Author, *Seeds of Terror*), 22 September 2010.
- Anna Elliot of Bamyān Media in Afghanistan described Afghan pride at being an unconquerable people in a Monitor 360 interview. Monitor 360 interview with Anna Elliot (Bamyān Media), 24 September 2010.
- A 2010 poll of public opinion of Afghanistan indicated that 40 percent of Afghans surveyed had “a lot” or “a little” sympathy with armed opposition groups in Afghanistan. “Afghanistan in 2010: A Survey of the Afghan People,” The Asia Foundation. 2010: <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2010survey.pdf>.
- A 2009 *Foreign Policy* op-ed argues that a perception of declining US commitment demoralized the Afghan government and people, while strengthening the Taliban. This perception underscores the narrative’s reminder that the United States will leave just as other great powers have left Afghanistan without providing for the stability of the Afghan people. “It hasn’t been 8 years of drift in Afghanistan,” *Foreign Policy*. 10 November 2009: http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/11/10/it_hasnt_been_8_years_of_drift_in_afghanistan.

- The toll of foreign powers competing in Afghanistan is usually borne by Afghan citizens, according to a 2009 report. Referring to Afghanistan's civil wars, a Kabul resident said, "We lost everything because of these military [rivalries.] We do not want to get caught in these games again." "Karzai's Great Gamble," Institute for War & Peace Reporting. 13 February 2009: <http://iwpr.net/report-news/karzai%E2%80%99s-great-gamble>.

Significance for Analysts

- Afghanistan expert Noah Coburn described in a Monitor 360 interview a pervasive sense among many Afghans that the United States remains in the country out of its own self interest. This allegation fuels conspiracy theories regarding CIA tampering in Afghan elections and an explicit US strategy of not defeating the Taliban insurgency in order to justify maintaining a US troop presence. Monitor 360 interview with Noah Coburn (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Ben Sheppard described in a Monitor 360 interview that the India-Pakistan rivalry in Afghanistan is seen as a perpetuation of the Great Game narrative. Monitor 360 interview with Ben Sheppard (Potomac Institute for Policy Studies), 22 September 2010.
- Anna Elliot of Bamyān Media describes the Great Game narrative as the root of Afghan frustration with or hostility toward Pakistan. Monitor 360 interview with Anna Elliot (Bamyān Media), 24 September 2010.
- Historical associations with the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan serve as strong sources of antipathy toward the modern Russian state, despite increased Afghan-Russian security cooperation. The involvement of Russian forces in an October 2010 raid on a drug lab in Nangarhar province was a particular source of tension. Afghanistan expert Prakhar Sharma describes the raid as having "symbolic value in that it says: 'The Russians are back.'" Waliullah Rahmani of the Kabul Center of Strategic Studies added that "the Afghan people do not have good memories of the Russian forces. It is expected of countries that have a history of animosity in Afghanistan that they should respect the legitimate concerns of Afghanistan and not undermine its sovereignty." "Afghanistan: Russia will no longer be deterred by past sins," *Eurasianet.org*. 4 November 2010: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62307>.
- For Afghan influencers, referring to a foreign nation as a player in the new version of the Great Game is common parlance for criticizing their attempts to control over Afghanistan. For examples of the phrase being applied to Pakistan, the United States, Russia, Turkey, and China, see: "Pakistan Replays the 'Great Game,'" *Far Eastern Economic Review*. October 2005: <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=17642>; "Foul play in the Great Game," *Asia Times*. 13 July 2005: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/GG13Ag01.html; "Russia, Turkey and the Great Game: Changing teams," Centre for Research on Globalization. 26 January 2010: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=17215>; "Betting and bluffing in the new Great Game," *Asia Times*. 14 October 2010: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/LJ14Ag01.html.

"LIBERATORS OF AFGHANISTAN"

Key Phrases, Symbols, or Images

- **Shah Shuja:** Ruler of the Durrani empire from 1803-1809, Shah Shuja captured Kabul, imprisoned his rival, and declared himself King. He was deposed in 1809 and lived in exile for 30 years, before entering into an alliance with the British during the First Anglo-Afghan War and retaking power as the fifth Emir of Afghanistan, before being assassinated three years later. Today he is depicted as an illegitimate puppet leader, propped up by foreigners. Afghans (including the Taliban) critical of modern leaders such as Babrak Karmal and Hamid Karzai may describe them as modern incarnations of Shah Shuja.
- **Babrak Karmal:** President of Afghanistan from 1979-1986, Karmal was a founding member of the communist PDPA. His association with communism led many Afghans to view him as a Soviet puppet. His failure to consolidate power led Soviet patronage to end, and he was replaced as party leader by Mohammad Najibullah. Today Karmal is depicted by his critics—including the Taliban—as a traitor to the Afghan people and a corrupt and ineffectual leader, accusations which are also levied against the current Kabul government.
- **Mujahideen:** Afghan "freedom fighters" who mobilize against foreign militaries. The Taliban have taken the mantle of mujahideen from previous militant factions who fought against Soviet occupation in the 1970s. The Taliban also occasionally refers to all of Afghanistan as the *mujahid* nation in order to cast their insurgency as a nation-wide struggle.
- **Shabnamah:** Or "night letters," *shabnamah* are propaganda messages that are posted throughout villages by Taliban insurgents demanding that Afghans resist foreign armies present in Afghanistan and threatening citizens who cooperate with the Afghan government or ISAF forces.
- **Munafiqin:** Meaning "hypocrites," the Taliban uses this term to describe Afghans who cooperate with US forces.
- **Kafir:** Meaning "disbelievers," the Taliban uses this term to refer to Americans and other foreigners in Afghanistan.

Quotations

1. “Taliban slick propaganda confronts US,” *BBC News*. 3 August 2009: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8176259.stm.
2. “Why the Taliban is Winning the Propaganda War,” *Time*. 3 May 2009: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1895496,00.html>.
3. “Afghan Taliban Leader Mullah Omar Urges to ‘Continue Resistance’ in Eid Message,” *Taliban Voice of Jihad Online* via www.opensource.gov. 15 November 2010: SAP20101115618002.
4. “Afghanistan in 2010: A Survey of the Afghan People,” The Asia Foundation. 2010: <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2010survey.pdf>.
5. “Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?” International Crisis Group. 24 July 2008: http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/158_taliban_propaganda_winning_the_war_of_words.ashx.

Sources

Audience Segment

- According to Rebecca Zimmerman of RAND Corporation, while the Taliban tap into a sense of grievance over foreign occupation, its variant of the broader “Great Game” master narrative is unique to its followers. Complaints about foreign invasion are deeply held even among Afghans who actively oppose the Taliban. Monitor 360 interview with Rebecca Zimmerman (RAND Corporation), 24 November 2010.
- In its propaganda efforts, the Taliban attempts to portray itself as both a government in exile—keeping intact the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan name used during its time in power in Kabul—and a broad-based popular movement. However, it does not deny that its leaders and most of its rank and file are dominated by Pashtuns. While the movement claims to be a continuation of the Taliban rule of all of Afghanistan of 1996-2001, it fundamentally remains a nationalist, Pashtun-dominated organization. “The Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan—organization, leadership and worldview,” Norwegian Defence Research Establishment. 5 February 2010: http://www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00136/00359_136353a.pdf.

Master Narrative

- The “Liberators of Afghanistan” master narrative was described in detail and validated in Monitor 360 interviews with a number of Afghanistan experts. Monitor 360 interviews with Ben Sheppard (Potomac Institute for Policy Studies), 17 September 2010; Gretchen Peters (Author, *Seeds of Terror*), 22 September 2010; Anna Elliot (Bamyam Media), 24 September 2010; Selig Harrison (Center for International Policy), 23 November 2010; Matt Waldman (London School of Economics), 23 November 2010; Rebecca Zimmerman (RAND Corporation), 24 November 2010; Noah Coburn (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010; Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Matt Waldman describes the “Liberators of Afghanistan” narrative as primarily a narrative of national liberation. According to Waldman, religion is used as a unifying force of the Afghan people, but is a secondary concern in Taliban propaganda. Monitor 360 interview with Matt Waldman (London School of Economics), 23 November 2010.
- Gretchen Peters contrasts the “very steady and powerful subtheme of nationalism” of the Afghan Taliban narrative with less-nationalistic militant groups operating in the region, including Al Qaeda and the Pakistan Taliban. Monitor 360 interview with Gretchen Peters (Author, *Seeds of Terror*), 22 September 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Ahmad Idrees Rahmani describes the Taliban narrative as rooted in the pride of Afghanistan never being conquered by foreign forces. Rahmani says that the Taliban virulently hews to Afghan perceptions that Afghanistan is the graveyard of empires. This is a critical component of Taliban recruiting efforts, as their propaganda espouses the certitude that “every superpower [in Afghanistan] God has defeated, this one will also be defeated.” Monitor 360 interview with Ahmad Idrees Rahmani (Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies), 29 September 2010.
- A critical component of the Taliban narrative is certitude that foreign forces will eventually leave like the Soviets did and the Taliban will return to power and punish those who collaborated with foreign occupiers. According to Anna Elliot of Bamyam Media, this belief instills fear in many Afghans, as there is a common perception that the Taliban know which villagers are cooperating with US soldiers and will punish them when back in power. Monitor 360 interview with Anna Elliot (Bamyam Media), 24 September 2010.
- Anne Stenersen describes the Taliban insurgency as a “nationalist-religious movement” that differs from other militants operating in Afghanistan because of its primary concern for fighting for Islam within Afghanistan alone. Stenersen identifies the insurgency’s desired end-state as the re-installation of an Islamic regime in Kabul, with the

withdrawal of foreign troops an intermediary goal. “The Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan—organization, leadership and worldview,” Norwegian Defence Research Establishment. 5 February 2010: http://www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00136/00359_136353a.pdf.

- An analysis of narrative themes used by the Taliban in their “night letters” is instrumental in understanding the Taliban narrative. Thomas Johnson of the Naval Postgraduate School argues that the Taliban are mimicking a successful strategy from their time in power, with some modifications, during their insurgency campaign. The narrative themes, according to Johnson, include an appeal to past struggles against foreign invaders, the “cosmic conflict” between the righteous Taliban and the infidel Karzai regime and its American backers, the casting of enemies as “crusaders” who are attempting to destroy Islam, the power of martyrdom to save Afghanistan, the honor of waging jihad against enemies, and prohibitions against any active or tacit support for the occupying forces. “The Taliban Insurgency and an Analysis of *Shabnamah* (Night Letters),” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 18, No. 3. September 2007: http://www.nps.edu/programs/ccs/Docs/Pubs/Small_Wars_%20Pub.pdf.
- The Taliban use this narrative as part of a larger propaganda campaign. In areas where the narrative is resonant, the Taliban have successfully taken control of the territory. In areas where this narrative does not hold traction, the narrative is reinforced by an intimidation campaign that equates those who do not resist American forces and the Afghan government with Soviet sympathizers of the 1980s and threatens them with violence. “Why the Taliban is Winning the Propaganda War,” *Time*. 3 May 2009: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1895496,00.html>.
- An important component of this narrative is the endurance of the Taliban, which implies that the Taliban will remain in Afghanistan long after the foreign occupiers leave. This has a powerful influence on neutral Afghan civilians who are convinced that they will face retribution if they support outside forces and will have to live with the Taliban following the certain withdrawal of US forces. “The Taliban’s information warfare,” Royal Danish Defence College. December 2007: http://www.forsvaret.dk/fak/documents/fak/publikationer/the_talibans_information_warfare.pdf.
- The Taliban’s aims—as perpetuated by Mullah Omar—are primarily nationalistic, rather than the transnational or global jihad perpetuated by Al Qaeda and affiliated groups. “How NATO hopes to undercut the Afghan Taliban,” *The Christian Science Monitor*. 18 December 2009: <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2009/1220/How-NATO-hopes-to-undercut-the-Afghan-Taliban>; “Aims of the London conference on Afghanistan,” *BBC News*. 28 January 2010: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8480368.stm>.

Significance for Strategic Communicators

- Matt Waldman of the London School of Economics described the divergence between Taliban and Al Qaeda worldviews. According to Waldman, ascribing Islamic extremism to the Taliban is a misinterpretation of their worldview, partially explained by a misunderstanding of the Taliban’s use of Sharia in their messaging. Monitor 360 interview with Matt Waldman (London School of Economics), 23 November 2010.
- Barmak Pazhwak of the United States Institute of Peace explained that this narrative drives many Pashtuns who live in Taliban-controlled areas to the Taliban due to the perceived illegitimacy of the American-supported Kabul government. Monitor 360 interview with Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- Ahmad Idrees Rahmani of the Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies describes Afghanistan as a “warrior nation.” Rahmani says bravery and warrior culture are integral to Afghan society, and that Taliban influencers successfully tap into these values in their messaging. Rahmani also said that US references to insurgent leaders as “warlords” inadvertently legitimize them in the eyes of Afghans who subscribe to these values. Monitor 360 interview with Ahmad Idrees Rahmani (Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies), 29 September 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Ben Sheppard describes the Taliban’s inherent advantage in disseminating its message throughout Afghanistan and the importance of oral tradition in Afghanistan. According to Sheppard, village elders retelling stories is a critical form of communication in Afghan society and lends itself well to Taliban messaging about previous victories over foreign powers rather than American messages about security, stability, and development. Monitor 360 interview with Ben Sheppard (Potomac Institute for Policy Studies), 17 September 2010.
- Thomas Johnson of the Naval Postgraduate School describes the challenges of US strategic communications in Afghanistan. According to Johnson, successful messaging campaigns require an intimate grasp of local and ethnic dynamics in a highly fragmented population with shifting motives and alliances. Understanding the success of the Taliban’s night letters and the narrative themes that resonate most strongly with village populations—including appeals to past successes over foreign invaders, the current threat to Islam, the casting of the Afghan government as a puppet regime and its collaborators as traitors, the power of martyrdom, and the threat of retribution when the Taliban inevitably retake power—can improve cultural intelligence and uncover opportunities for counter-messaging. “The Taliban Insurgency and an Analysis of *Shabnamah* (Night Letters),” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 18, No. 3. September 2007: http://www.nps.edu/programs/ccs/Docs/Pubs/Small_Wars_%20Pub.pdf.

- A critical persuasive theme of Taliban propaganda is that foreigners have come to Afghanistan to destabilize and control it. A night letter circulated in 2008 in Wardak province read in part, “Non-Muslims and Westerners are implementing their own laws in order to spread immorality and corruption throughout Afghanistan and Islamic countries.” Another theme is that the Taliban will endure long after American forces withdraw, and that citizens who collaborate with Americans will be treated with harsh retribution, with a 2007 letter in Khost reading, “Those from your community who participate in this infidel solidarity...If you act against Islam or speak against the Taliban...Hell is your place.” “Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?” International Crisis Group. 24 July 2008: http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/158_taliban_propaganda__winning_the_war_of_words.ashx; “Doing good gets dangerous,” *Los Angeles Times*. 3 May 2008: <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/may/03/news/OE-HUSARSKA3>.

Significance for Analysts

- In a Monitor 360 interview, Afghanistan expert Matt Waldman described Taliban propaganda efforts in spreading their narrative to Afghans. According to Waldman, the Taliban uses themes of liberation to appeal to Afghans who support neither the Taliban nor the Kabul government. Waldman says that while the themes of the narrative may resonate with most Afghans, ongoing violence and the Taliban’s failure to provide security and government services while in power prevents the Taliban from gaining sympathy in large numbers. Monitor 360 interview with Matt Waldman (London School of Economics), 23 November 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Barmak Pazhwak described divisions between Taliban influencers related to this master narrative. According to Pazhwak, not all Taliban commanders sided with Mullah Omar following the overthrow of the Taliban government. Some Taliban leaders were more willing to reconcile with the United States and the Kabul government; however, the relative scarcity of Pashtun and former Taliban representation in the government has weakened this willingness to cooperate. Monitor 360 interview with Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- Analysis of Mullah Omar’s November 2010 Eid message suggests that the larger Taliban umbrella movement may be suffering from cracks and fissures. Addressing the creation of local, NATO, and government-supported militias in his statement may indicate that the insurgency is struggling to carry out operations, while his appeal to the international Muslim community—including Arab states—to send money to fund the Afghan insurgency may indicate a struggle to maintain reliable support. “NATO reads weakness in Taliban leader Mullah Omar’s annual Eid statement,” *The Christian Science Monitor*. 16 November 2010: <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2010/1116/NATO-reads-weakness-in-Taliban-leader-Mullah-Omar-s-annual-Eid-statement>.
- Anne Stenersen describes how internal factions within the Taliban movement have differing conceptions of the ideal end state for the Taliban insurgency. In a 2006 interview with al Jazeera, Mullah Dadullah, Taliban leader, spokesman, and influential recruiter in Pakistan, said that the Islamic Emirate would not stop fighting until American troops withdrew from both Afghanistan and Iraq, indicating a more global scope of anti-American opposition than the strict Afghan nationalism primarily espoused by Mullah Omar. “The Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan—organization, leadership and worldview,” Norwegian Defence Research Establishment. 5 February 2010: http://www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00136/00359_136353a.pdf.
- While the Taliban portrays itself as a united movement in line with its projection as a government in exile, the truth is far more complicated and fractious. Afghan militant groups including the Haqqani network, the Yunus Khalis network, and Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin operate and release statements with autonomy. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, in fact, denies that he is part of the Taliban movement, saying in a 2008 interview, “We don’t have any kind of link with al-Qaeda, Afghan or Pakistani Taliban.” A former HIG member said that Hekmatyar is more likely to ally with the Kabul government than Mullah Omar. “Afghan rebel positioned for key role,” *Washington Post*. 5 November 2008: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/04/AR2008110403604.html>; “Qazi Amin Waqad assess the threat from Hizb-e-Islami,” Kabul Center for Strategic Studies. 1 October 2007: <http://kabalcenter.org/?p=91>.
- The relationship between the Taliban under Mullah Omar and Al Qaeda under the leadership of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri remains complex and subject to contradiction in analyzing the statements of leaders of both groups. The late Taliban commander Mullah Dadullah said that the groups had close links and that Al Qaeda leaders gave orders directly to Taliban soldiers. However, other Taliban leaders and Al Qaeda leaders have not substantiated this position. Al Qaeda deputy leader Ayman al-Zawahiri said in 2008 that Mullah Omar is the commander of Afghanistan and bin Laden is one of his soldiers. Mullah Omar, however, claimed in 2007 that he no longer had a personal relationship with bin Laden, saying, “I have not met bin Laden for the past five years, nor attempted to meet him,” and adding, “We have never felt the need for a permanent relationship with al-Qaida.” “Mullah Omar says hasn’t seen bin Laden for years,” *Reuters*. 4 January 2007: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16467288/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/.

“PRESERVING LOCAL RULE”

Key Phrases, Symbols, or Images

- **Malik:** Dari term for a local community leader in a rural area who serves as a quasi-liaison between the community and the government.
- **Qawm:** Political or social grouping term that, depending on context, can refer to an identity group ranging from a single family to an entire ethnic group. Depending on how local audiences define it, many Afghans’ primary loyalties rest with their *qawm*.
- **“Mayor of Kabul”:** A derisive title for Afghan President Hamid Karzai that suggests that the Kabul government holds little power outside of the capital city.
- **Hukumat:** Dari term for an area of where the government holds authority.

Quotations

1. “Afghan tribal elders claim to hold key to truce with Taliban,” The Canadian Press via www.opensource.gov. 19 February 2010: FBS20100222546243.
2. “NATO to engage Afghan tribes in Taliban fight,” *Reuters* via www.opensource.gov. 22 December 2008: IAP20081223011002.

Sources

Audience Segment

- This narrative’s resonance with local Afghans, particularly in rural areas, was validated in Monitor 360 interview with Afghanistan experts. Monitor 360 interviews with Noah Coburn (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010; Yama Torabi (Integrity Watch Afghanistan), 2 December 2010.
- Ben Sheppard of the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies described the importance of analyzing ethnic groups in Afghanistan down to the tribal and village level. Monitor 360 interview with Ben Sheppard (Potomac Institute for Policy Studies), 17 September 2010.
- In a Monitor 360 interview, Anna Elliot of Bamyān Media described this narrative’s resonance with Afghans who put ethnic and regional identity above Afghan national identity. Monitor 360 interview with Anna Elliot (Bamyān Media), 24 September 2010.

Master Narrative

- This narrative was validated and described by multiple Afghanistan experts in conversations with Monitor 360. Monitor 360 interviews with Anna Elliot (Bamyān Media), 24 September 2010; Ahmad Idrees Rahmani (Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies), 29 September 2010; Scott Worden (United States Institute of Peace), 23 November 2010; Selig Harrison (Center for International Policy), 23 November 2010; Noah Coburn (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010; Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010; Rebecca Zimmerman (RAND Corporation), 24 November 2010; Yama Torabi (Integrity Watch Afghanistan), 2 December 2010.
- Ahmad Idrees Rahmani of the Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies attributes this master narrative’s endurance in part to Afghan geography. Rahmani describes Afghanistan as a collection of large valleys with mountains cutting off contact between regions. This geography has led to isolation of different ethnic groups and has made Afghanistan historically difficult to govern from Kabul. The impact of geography on local governance in Afghanistan was also described by Afghanistan expert Scott Worden. Monitor 360 interviews with Ahmad Idrees Rahmani (Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies), 29 September 2010; Scott Worden (United States Institute of Peace), 23 November 2010.
- Noah Coburn of the United States Institute of Peace explained how even strong Afghan leaders through history, such as Daoud Khan and Abdur Rahman Khan, offered a great deal of autonomy to local leaders during their rule. Monitor 360 interview with Noah Coburn (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- In a Monitor 360 interview, Afghanistan expert Selig Harrison described how the reign of King Zahir Shah is looked upon favorably due to his decentralization of power and resources among the diverse communities of Afghanistan. Monitor 360 interview with Selig Harrison (Center for International Policy), 23 November 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Rebecca Zimmerman described a critical element of this narrative: the failure of the Kabul government to define itself as separate from President Karzai. According to Zimmerman, most Afghans still refer to Karzai when discussing the government, not the government as a whole. Monitor 360 interview with Rebecca Zimmerman (RAND Corporation), 24 November 2010.

- A 2009 analysis of governance in Afghanistan underscores the historical anomaly of strong centralized governance in the country. According to the analysis, the current approach to establishing a central government violates traditional power mechanisms. Most *qawms* resist authority that they perceive as illegitimate, e.g., Kabul-based governance. The only successful instances of centralized governance in Afghanistan occurred due to two factors: (1) the co-option of a sufficient number of *qawms* by the central authority, and (2) the central government's ability to gain access to external resources through plundering regional neighbors or receiving foreign aid. "Authority, legitimacy, and the *qawm*: Historical perspectives on emergent governance in Afghanistan," School of Advanced Military Studies. May 2009: <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA505494>.
- Afghanistan expert Stephen Biddle of the Council on Foreign Relations describes attempts by the British, Soviets, and the United States to centralize authority in Afghanistan as at odds with Afghanistan's history of governance. Biddle points out that even under periods of Pashtun monarchy, Afghan central government was weak and greater power was held by local and tribal leaders. Centralization attempts in the 1920s under Amanullah Khan and the 1970s under the Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party led to conflicts between the central government and local leaders who refused to cede power. Local authorities remain the primary source for governance and allocation of resources in the majority of the country. "Defining Success in Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs*. July/August 2010. Print.
- A 2010 *Foreign Affairs* article examines the power that local leaders hold in communities and its implication for counter-insurgency and nation-building efforts in Afghanistan. The article concludes, "Rural communities have been protecting their villages for centuries and can do it better than the Afghan government or international forces." "It Takes the Villages," *Foreign Affairs*. May/June 2010: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66350/seth-g-jones/it-takes-the-villages?page=show>.
- Afghanistan expert Larry Goodson describes strong central governments as a "curse on Afghanistan for more than a generation," and says that central government disrupted the regional and ethnic balances that provided stability. Central government has turned Afghanistan into "a mass of rubble and mine-strewn fields." Afghan historian Alam Payind says of the country, "Afghanistan traditionally lived under a sort of central government that was not fully in control of everything, one that was not supreme and that often you couldn't even see." "Break Up Afghanistan: Sure, Why Not?" *New York Times*. 1 December 2001: <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/01/arts/break-up-afghanistan-why-not.html>.
- Shah Shuja, King of Afghanistan from 1803-1809, aligned Afghanistan with the United Kingdom in an attempt to centralize his authority and defend against a Russian invasion of India that would have passed through Afghanistan. He was restored to the throne as Emir of Afghanistan by the British in 1839 during the First Anglo-Afghan War but was deposed following the British retreat. Today, he is invoked as an example of a foreign-backed leader who illegitimately took power from local rulers. In 2010, Member of Parliament Malalai Joya criticized President Karzai by referring to him as the "third" Shah Shuja, following the Russian-backed Babrak Karmal, the "second Shah Shuja." Joya said that Karzai is a "US puppet who has also joined hands with our internal enemies." "The NS Interview: Malalai Joya," *The New Statesman*. 25 January 2010: <http://www.newstatesman.com/asia/2010/01/interview-afghanistan-obama>. Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar also casts Karzai as a new Shah Shuja in Taliban propaganda. "Afghanistan deadline is not smart policy," American Enterprise Institute. 8 March 2010: <http://www.aei.org/article/101765>.
- Local leaders hold significant influence even in positions where they are appointed by the central government, as indicated by the strong rule of Balkh governor Atta Mohammad Noor. Atta, a Tajik and former *mujahideen* commander in *Jamiat-e Islami*, enjoys wide support in the province. A 2009 report from Balkh indicates that tensions may arise if President Karzai reasserts Kabul's authority in the province by removing Atta from office, with one Atta supporter saying that the people of Mazar-e-Sharif will protest if Atta is elected, and some may turn violent. "Powerful Afghan governor challenges president," *Wall Street Journal*. 6 November 2009: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125745832585731891.html>; "In Afghanistan's North, Ex-Warlord Offers Security," *New York Times*. 17 May 2010: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/18/world/asia/18mazar.html>.
- In some districts in Balkh province, Atta has supported a program of allowing local militias to enforce security with the approval of village and provincial authorities. Atta admitted to acting outside of the authority granted to him by the Kabul government, saying that the dire need for additional forces justified his decision. Atta also said that the commanders have the full support of the people they will protect and are the "best ones to improve security in dangerous areas." An Interior Ministry spokesman in Kabul said he was unaware of any local militia activity in Balkh province. "Could Local Militias Shape the Afghan Elections?" *Time*. 18 September 2010: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2019986,00.html>.

Significance for Strategic Communicators

- Yama Torabi of Integrity Watch Afghanistan describes Afghan confusion at what they perceive as the international community's focus on multi-culturalism. According to Torabi, ethnic identities in Afghanistan are seen as exclusive; as a result, messages from the international community that stress both the need for a centralized state and respect for different ethnic groups are seen as contradictory. Monitor 360 interview with Yama Torabi (Integrity Watch Afghanistan), 2 December 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Noah Coburn described how this narrative's subscribers are amenable to strong central government only so far as it does not impede local governance. Monitor 360 interview with Noah Coburn (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Rebecca Zimmerman described Afghan rejection of US messages that describe the strength of the Kabul government. According to Zimmerman, many Afghans see the Kabul government as one of the most negative influences on their life and react harshly to suggestions that they should cooperate with it. Monitor 360 interview with Rebecca Zimmerman (RAND Corporation), 24 November 2010.
- Barmak Pazhwak of the United States Institute of Peace described how subscribers to this narrative reject local leaders who are seen as under the control of the Kabul government. Monitor 360 interview with Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- US overtures to local and tribal leaders can have blowback effects. A 2010 plan to offer Shinwari tribal elders in Nangarhar province the authority to allocate one million dollars in development projects in exchange for cooperation against the Taliban and the opium trade was canceled after Nangarhar's powerful governor, Gul Agha Shirzai, complained to President Karzai about US interference in tribal affairs. A report indicates that the plan angered leaders of other tribes in the area who did not receive similar offers. "US military runs into Afghan tribal politics after deal with Pashtuns," *Washington Post*. 10 May 2010: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/09/AR2010050903257_pf.html.
- In discussing the proposed deal with the Shinwari, Afghanistan expert Gilles Dorronsoro said that most tribal militias and leaders have no faith in the Karzai government, seeing it as weak and corrupt. When the agreement with the Shinwari was reached, one elder said of it, "We are doing this for ourselves and ourselves only. We have absolutely no faith in the Afghan government to do anything for us. We don't trust them at all." "A Sunni Awakening: Not So Easy in Afghanistan," *Time*. 18 May 2010: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1989686,00.html>.
- A 2010 *Foreign Policy* editorial advocates for the dispersal of international aid at the local and provincial level rather than the national level, while keeping accountability standards in place. The author also advocates for strengthening local governance, and argues that "international support for local governance structures does not mean opposing the central government" "Afghanistan's politics should be local," *Foreign Policy*. 14 July 2010: http://afpak.foreign-policy.com/posts/2010/07/14/afghanistans_politics_should_be_local.
- In 2010, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said that the United States was rebalancing its approach to Afghan security by working with local security forces, and that the new approach would reflect Afghanistan's "history and culture where regional, provincial and local authority have always been strong" and "re-empower some of the tribal shuras." "Why Afghanistan is at best a work in progress," *Washington Post*. 5 September 2010: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/03/AR2010090304152.html>.

Significance for Analysts

- Scott Worden of the United States Institute of Peace described how subscription to this narrative can influence rural Afghans' perception of local leaders. Worden related an anecdote regarding the election of elders to oversee a UN development project in Kunar province. After the elders were chosen in the district governors' house, the project failed due to perceptions that the elders must have been bribed if the election took place in the governors' house. As a compromise, a new election was held in the village mosque, with the same elders being chosen. Worden underscored the importance of compliance with local custom in convincing local Afghans that the democratic process was legitimate. Monitor 360 interview with Scott Worden (United States Institute of Peace), 23 November 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Noah Coburn described this narrative's ability to highlight tensions between local leaders and central government institutions that can spill over into conflict. Coburn described the example of Pashtun leader Pacha Khan Zadran, who disputes his loss in the 2010 parliamentary election. Zadran, who maintains a cadre of armed supporters, said that he does not accept the results and therefore does not accept the government. Monitor 360 interview with Noah Coburn (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- A 2010 report regarding the *Wolesi Jirga* elections indicates that campaigns demonstrate competing forms of authority within Afghanistan. Competing candidates use campaign images and rhetoric that portray them as either men of the rural people who will advocate only for bringing resources to the local community or as bridges between different modes of authority, e.g., local leadership and the Kabul government. "Afghan Election, 2010: Alternative Narratives," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. September 2010: http://www.areas.org.af/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=26&task=doc_download&gid=807.

- A 2009 op-ed equates President Karzai with Amir Abdur Rahman Khan in portraying the Kabul government as an illegitimate authority that supersedes local rule. “Karzai’s obsession with power,” *Afghan Online Press*. 15 June 2009: http://www.aopnews.com/opinion/khadija_power.shtml.
- Ahmed Nader Nadery of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission points out that conflict could arise between security forces under the command of local and provincial leaders and national security forces, including the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police. “Could Local Militias Shape the Afghan Elections?” *Time*. 18 September 2010: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2019986,00.html>.

“UNITED AFGHANISTAN”

Key Phrases, Symbols, or Images

- **Zahir Shah:** The last king of Afghanistan, Zahir Shah is known as the “Father of the Nation” in the Afghan constitution written and adopted in 2004. Zahir Shah commands a large amount of respect from Afghans because he presided over the “Decade of Democracy” in the 1960s, and Zahir Shah was welcomed back to the country in 2002 to attend the *loya jirga* to select a new Afghan leader. He is reported to have said, “I will accept the responsibility of head of state if that is what the Loya Jirga demands of me, but I have no intention to restore the monarchy. I do not care about the title of king. The people call me Baba and I prefer this title.”
- **Abdur Rahman Khan (the “Iron Emir”):** Emir of Afghanistan from 1880-1901, Abdur Rahman curtailed the power of local political and religious leaders and consolidated control of the country in Kabul. While Abdur Rahman is notorious for formally accepting the Durand Line border treaty, he is also known for re-uniting Afghanistan after the Second Anglo-Afghan War.
- **1964 Constitution:** After Mohammad Yousuf was appointed Prime Minister in 1963, he established a constitutional committee that produced a draft constitution that was then accepted by a *loya jirga* in 1964. The new constitution stated that the royal family could not hold public office or participate in political parties, and established the *Shura* as a government institutions.
- **“Decade of Democracy”:** After the establishment of the 1964 constitution, Afghanistan experienced ten years of a constitutional monarchy, during which the country experienced relatively free elections, formation of political parties, and the creation of independent parliamentary and judiciary bodies.

Quotations

1. “Kabul prepares for king’s return,” *CNN*. 17 April 2002: http://articles.cnn.com/2002-04-17/world/afghan.monarch19.52_1_zahir-shah-kabul-afghanistan?s=PM:WORLD.
2. “Former King of Afghanistan Dies at 92,” *The New York Times*. 23 July 2007: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/23/world/asia/23cnd-shah.html?_r=1.

Sources

Audience Segment

- Interviews with a number of Afghanistan experts verified that the urban elite and central government supporters were subscribers to this master narrative. Monitor 360 interviews with Noah Coburn (United States Institute of Peace), 23 November 2010; Scott Worden (United States Institute of Peace), 23 November 2010; Anna Elliot (Bamyan Media), 24 September 2010; Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010; Yama Torabi (Integrity Watch Afghanistan), 2 December 2010.
- Yama Torabi noted that this narrative is dominant among the Afghan political elites, including those who have supported decentralized government in the past. Afghans believe that a centralized state, and centralization of power, is the only way to ensure one actor is maintaining security and stability throughout the country. Monitor 360 interview with Yama Torabi (Integrity Watch Afghanistan), 2 December 2010.
- Describing the events leading up to the development of a centralized government in Afghanistan in 2002, a *Foreign Affairs* article notes, “After the Taliban were removed from power, in 2001, strong Pashtun support, combined with fears of a return to the civil war of the 1990s, created a majority in favor of a centralizing constitution.” “Defining Success in Afghanistan,” *Foreign Affairs*. July/August 2010. Print.

Master Narrative

- Barmak Pazhwak noted in an interview that Afghanistan enjoyed a period of peace and stability from 1933–1978, before the Soviet invasion. The authority of the central government was basically unchallenged, there were only two riots during this period against the central government, and rulers knew how to share power with stakeholders across the country. Now, Pazhwak argues, the situation has changed—people are leaving the country for the cities, and the central government needs to illustrate that it has the ability to supply services to the people. Pazhwak notes that from 2002–2003, Afghans looked to the central government for leadership, but since then ongoing instability has challenged that trust. Monitor 360 interview with Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- According to Afghanistan expert Scott Worden, the 1960s and 1970s were a period of peace, progressivism, and modernism in Afghanistan. Coeducation was the norm, women wore miniskirts and shops were open where Afghans could buy music records. There is nostalgia for that period of time with the political elites and middle class. The Soviet invasion is seen as the end of an era, and there is still a significant amount of blame placed on the Soviets for destroying Afghanistan's era of modernity. Monitor 360 interview with Scott Worden (United States Institute of Peace), 23 November 2010.
- For an extensive history of the period of peace that started with Abdur Rahman Khan and ended with the 1972 coup, see: Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*. Blackwell Publishing. 2008. Print.
- For discussion of the recent attempts at centralized governance in Afghanistan, and an explanation of how the past history affects present-day governance, see: Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton University Press. 2010. Print.
- J. Alexander Thier notes in an April 2010 article that Afghanistan's experiment with peace and democracy began “with the promulgation of the 1964 Afghan Constitution by King Mohammad Zaher, which ushered in what is commonly referred to as the ‘decade of democracy.’ “Afghanistan's Rocky Path to Peace,” *Current History*. April 2010: <http://www.currenthistory.com/Article.php?ID=788>.

Significance for Strategic Communicators

- The “United Afghanistan” narrative has the most currency with those Afghans that live in urban centers, because those in rural parts of the country seen little change from decentralization. Rural Afghans believe that their historic rule of law is the best way to govern, noting that even when the Taliban were in power rural areas resisted Taliban rule because it went against traditional structures. Monitor 360 interview with Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- In a discussion about legitimacy and power in Afghanistan, an International Crisis Group paper noted of the Taliban, “[they] do not need to win militarily; they often just need to outwait their opponents. Hence depicting themselves as unflagging and their ultimate victory as inevitable is crucial to securing advantage. The Taliban seeks to portray itself as steadfast and its violence as legitimate. Growing popular discontent with the corruption of those in power only helps fuel grievances, even among those for whom the Taliban holds no natural appeal.” “Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?” International Crisis Group. 24 July 2008: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/158-taliban-propaganda-winning-the-war-of-words.aspx>.
- According to an ICOS report, when interviewees in Kandahar, Helmand, Panjshir, and Parwan provinces were asked why they might support the Taliban, “Only 3% of the interviewees mention the application of Sharia law and building of Islamic schools, indicating that support for the Taliban feeds perhaps more on the failures of the central government over the past decade, rather than on ideology.” Additionally while Afghans support the right to vote, many of them cannot describe what democracy means. “Afghanistan Transition: Missing Variables,” International Council on Security and Development. November 2010: http://www.icosgroup.net/documents/afghanistan_transition_missing_variables.pdf.
- A 2007 Department of State polling study noted, “Nationwide, a large majority (85%) think it essential for Afghanistan to remain one nation. This proportion is up from 2004 when a smaller majority (67%) called for a unified Afghanistan and a quarter felt parts of Afghanistan should be allowed to separate if local populations chose to do so.” “Afghanistan: Closer to One Nation than a House Divided,” Department of State Office of Analysis via www.opensource.gov. 29 January 2007: FBS20070216569923.
- A 2009 United States Institute of Peace report notes, “At present, there appears to be a very notional understanding of democracy by the population as a whole. Such a limited understanding of democracy has implications. For example, voters appear to have highly unrealistic expectations about what candidates will be able to do for them if elected. These expectations might be tempered if there is a better understanding of the system and process as well as the duties and responsibilities of elected officials before elections take place.” “The Future of Afghanistan,” United States Institute of Peace. 2009: <http://www.usip.org/files/resources/foa.pdf>.

Significance for Analysts

- Afghanistan expert Ahmad Idrees Rahmani noted that the Taliban are able to recruit from local areas because Afghans there do not believe the central government has any legitimacy. Monitor 360 interview with Ahmad Idrees Rahmani (Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies), 29 September 2010.
- In an interview with *Harper's Magazine*, Afghanistan expert Thomas Barfield notes that part of the dilemma of the central government narrative is that the local population believes Karzai is a poor leader. Barfield notes, "Had the government not been so highly centralized, this would be less of a problem. Even a badly flawed centralized structure might have succeeded if run by a talented leader, while a more expertly designed decentralized structure could survive the mistakes of a poor one." Barfield expresses the same perspective as those Afghans who are skeptical of the power of the central government, and may be concerned about future rifts within this power structure. "Afghanistan: Six Questions for Thomas Barfield," *Harper's Magazine*. 21 May 2010: <http://www.harper.org/archive/2010/05/hbc-90007078>.

"PAKISTAN TAKEOVER"

Key Phrases, Symbols, or Images

- **"Fifth province"**: Phrase that refers to Afghanistan as one of Pakistan's provinces, used by subscribers of this narrative to describe Pakistani motives to take over Afghanistan. This term is not widely used outside of elite circles.
- **"Mr. Ten Percent"**: A common political joke used to describe Pakistan President Zardari as corrupt, alleging that Zardari demands 10% kickbacks on every contract the Pakistan government signs. This term is not widely used outside of elite circles.
- **Durand Line**: The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan demarcated by the British in 1893, Afghans—particularly Pashtuns—see the border as dividing Pashtun lands which are rightfully part of Afghanistan. Pakistan's enforcement of the border, and Afghan governments' consistent refusal to recognize it, are symbolic of tensions regarding Pakistan's purported intentions to control Afghan territory and divide the Afghan people.
- **"Greater Afghanistan"**: Belief that Afghan land extends beyond the Durand Line into Pashtun-controlled territories of Pakistan (such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province), the concept of Greater Afghanistan is indicative of the sense that Afghan land was amputated by the creation of Pakistan, and that Pakistan continues to deprive Afghanistan of its full territory.

Quotations

1. See, for instance: "Helmand despatch: 'Pakistan is the true enemy,'" *The Telegraph*. 1 August 2010: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/7920207/Helmand-despatch-Pakistan-is-the-true-enemy.html>.
2. "Highlights: Afghan Media and Leadership Statements About Pakistan, January 2010," Open Source Center via www.opensource.gov. 3 February 2010: SAP20100203651001.
3. Monitor 360 interview with Selig Harrison (Center for International Policy), 23 November 2010.
4. "Highlights: Afghan Media and Leadership Statements about Pakistan," Open Source Center via www.opensource.gov. 17 September 2010: SAP20100917651001.
5. "Pakistan Not Doing Enough in War against Terrorism: Kabul," *Daily Times* via www.opensource.gov. 9 November 2010: FBS2010112220202.
6. "Pakistan's ISI still supporting Taliban, say Afghans," *The Telegraph*. 15 October 2009: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/6338349/Pakistans-ISI-still-supporting-the-Taliban-say-Afghans.html>.
7. "Highlights: Afghan Media and Leadership Statements About Pakistan, January 2010," Open Source Center via www.opensource.gov. 3 February 2010: SAP20100203651001; "Highlights: Afghan Media and Leadership Statements about Pakistan, September 2010," Open Source Center via www.opensource.gov. 15 October 2010: SAP20101015651001.

Sources

Audience Segment

- Afghanistan experts verified that wariness and hostility toward Pakistan are common sentiments among the Afghan population as a whole, excluding the Taliban. Monitor 360 interviews with Ben Sheppard (Potomac Institute for Policy Studies), 17 September 2010; Gretchen Peters (Author, *Seeds of Terror*), 22 September 2010; Ahmad Idrees Rahmani (Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies), 29 September 2010; Matt Waldman (London School of Economics), 23 November 2010; Noah Coburn (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.

- Afghanistan expert Barnett Rubin draws a fine line between Pashtun Nationalists in Afghanistan and Islamic fundamentalist movements, saying “Pashtun Islamists are not nationalists and do not support that kind of ethnic issue against a fellow Muslim country—unlike the Pashtun nationalists.” “Afghanistan: ‘Pashtunistan’ issues linger behind Afghan-Pakistani row,” *Radio Free Europe*. 24 March 2006: <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1067048.html>.

Master Narrative

- Afghanistan expert Ahmad Idrees Rahmani noted that Afghan hatred of Pakistan extends back to the day Pakistan was created. Rahmani also discussed the importance of this narrative to political maneuvering, noting “a smart politician noting that he wants to fight Pakistan will get 100 percent of the vote the next day.” Monitor 360 interview with Ahmad Idrees Rahmani (Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies), 29 September 2010.
- Afghanistan experts described the narrative of Pakistan waiting to take over Afghanistan as a projection of Pakistan’s need to expand its power to guarantee its security. Monitor 360 interviews with Ben Sheppard (Potomac Institute for Policy Studies), 17 September 2010; Gretchen Peters (Author, *Seeds of Terror*), 22 September 2010.
- Pakistani author Ahmed Rashid argues that Pakistan is making a concerted effort to confront only global jihadist movements and Arab volunteer forces in the border regions, and ignoring the militancy of the Afghan Taliban because of its ability to destabilize Afghanistan and prevent the country from balancing with India against Pakistan. Monitor 360 interview with Ahmed Rashid (Pakistani journalist), 21 September 2010.
- According to Afghanistan expert Barnett Rubin, Pakistan has had an interest in supporting madrassas that would instill fundamentalist Islam and produce militants—such as the madrassas that served as the birthplace for the Taliban—in Afghanistan to ensure that Afghan governments would side with Pakistan against India. This idea supports subscribers’ belief that Pakistan supports militants in Afghanistan in order to threaten or weaken Afghanistan and bring the country in line with Pakistani interests. “Afghanistan: ‘Pashtunistan’ issues linger behind Afghan-Pakistani row,” *Radio Free Europe*. 24 March 2006: <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1067048.html>.
- Pakistani support for the Taliban and other Islamic militants was funneled through the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan’s intelligence agency, and aimed to counter secular Pashtun nationalists in the region, according to Ben Arnoldy of the *Christian Science Monitor*. “Pakistan’s Pashtuns, looking for statehood, may look to Taliban,” *The Christian Science Monitor*. 8 October 2009: <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2009/1008/p08s04-wosc.html>.
- A report by Barnett Rubin and Abubakar Siddique highlights “the long history of each state offering sanctuary to the other’s opponents [which] has built bitterness and mistrust between the two neighbors.” This history includes sanctuary offered by Kabul to Baluchi tribesmen wanted by the Pakistani military, to current Afghan claims that Pakistan shelters the Taliban. “Resolving the Pakistan-Afghanistan Stalemate,” United States Institute of Peace. October 2006: <http://www.usip.org/resources/resolving-pakistan-afghanistan-stalemate>.
- According to *Kabul Weekly* editorials, Pakistan’s ability to “create and support” the Taliban for years despite US demands to prevent extremism is indicative of Pakistan’s “enduring political strength” in the region. “Pakistan 1, Afghanistan 0,” *Kabul Weekly*. 31 March 2010: http://www.kw.af/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=239:pakistan-1-afghanistan-0&catid=29:the-cms&Itemid=29; “Don’t support pro-Taliban politicians,” *Kabul Weekly*. 16 June 2010: http://www.kw.af/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=298:dont-support-pro-taliban-politicians&catid=29:the-cms&Itemid=29.
- A 2010 report indicates that following American withdrawal, Pakistan will “have a grand impact on Afghanistan.” The report also indicates that Pakistan, through the ISI, continues to support the Afghan Taliban and hopes to see the Taliban return to power in Kabul. “Heading Towards a Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan,” Henry Jackson Society. 23 August 2010: <http://www.henryjacksonsociety.org/stories.asp?id=1710>.
- For more information on the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan since 2001, see: “Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations in the Post-9/11 Era,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. October 2006: http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cp72_grare_final.pdf.
- In 2006, President Karzai explained his perspective on Pakistani influence in Afghanistan, and expanded on the notion that Afghanistan cannot fully trust its neighbor. “Afghanistan/Pakistan: ‘Inseparable Twins’ In Need of Separation,” *Radio Free Europe*. 23 February 2006: <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1066082.html>.
- The Council on Foreign Relations’ Daniel Markey noted in an interview that Pakistan sees the withdrawal of US troops in Afghanistan as an opportunity to influence the type and character of governance in Afghanistan. “Pakistan’s Gambit in Afghanistan,” Council on Foreign Relations. 30 June 2010: http://www.cfr.org/publication/22567/pakistans_gambit_in_afghanistan.html.
- Senior Afghan officials expressed deep suspicion that the 2010 arrest of Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Baradar in Pakistan reflected a serious change of heart, or illustrated that Pakistan could be trusted as a regional power and an ally in the hunt for the Taliban. Even with gestures of good faith from the Pakistani military and intelligence ser-

vices, there is still a strong Afghan reaction for “reading between the lines and looking for evidence of a Pakistan conspiracy.” For more information on events in Afghanistan and Pakistan in early 2010, see: “Media Conference Call: U.S. Strategy in Pakistan and Afghanistan,” Council on Foreign Relations. 25 February 2010: http://www.cfr.org/publication/21531/media_conference_call.html.

- A report commissioned by the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation in Canada outlines the history of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations from the establishment of the Afghan state to the present day. “Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations: History and Geopolitics in a Regional and International Context,” Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation. 2008: http://www.gordonfn.org/resfiles/siddiqi_afghan-pak%20final2.pdf.

Significance for Strategic Communicators

- A 2010 *Kabul Weekly* editorial criticized President Karzai for showing weakness against Pakistan’s unwillingness to combat Afghan Taliban operating in border areas. The editorial concluded that Karzai’s weakness is putting Afghanistan in danger of being controlled by Pakistani foreign policy. “Pakistan 1, Afghanistan 0,” *Kabul Weekly*. 31 March 2010: http://www.kw.af/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=239:pakistan-1-afghanistan-0&catid=29:the-cms&Itemid=29.
- After Pakistani advisors cautioned the United States against raising troop levels in Afghanistan in 2009 without a simultaneous effort to engage moderate Taliban, observers noted that Afghan leaders are still suspicious of Pakistani involvement in Afghan political matters, specifically suspecting that Pakistan backs the Taliban in hopes of regaining influence in Kabul. “Pakistan advises Holbrooke talk to Taliban moderates,” *Reuters*. 10 February 2009: <http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-37944920090210>.
- Selig Harrison points out that the Taliban, with the backing of Pakistan, could control large border areas of Afghanistan to create an Islamic emirate for Pashtuns, merging the “appeal of pan-Islamic ideas and the long suppressed dream of a Pashtun state” at the expense of Afghan strength. “Pakistan’s Pashtuns, looking for statehood, may look to Taliban,” *The Christian Science Monitor*. 8 October 2009: <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2009/1008/p08s04-wosc.html>.

Significance for Analysts

- A 2008 article describes the escalation of diplomatic tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan as a result of the Afghan government implicating the ISI in instability in Afghanistan. “Afghan Leaders: Pakistan Behind Bloodshed,” *CBS News*. 14 July 2008: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/07/14/world/main4261417.shtml>.
- For more information on Afghan perspectives of US-Pakistan relationships, see: “Highlights: Afghan Media and Leadership Statements About Pakistan, January 2010,” Open Source Center via www.opensource.gov. February 2010: SAP20100203651001; “Highlights: Afghan Media and Leadership Statements about Pakistan, September 2010,” Open Source Center via www.opensource.gov. 15 October 2010: SAP20101015651001.
- The persistence of this narrative since Pakistan’s founding implies that Afghan leaders may continue to use it as a scapegoat for instability within the country. Though Afghanistan’s population holds a diverse set of perspectives and opinions on domestic issues, there is a fair level of consensus in state-run newspapers and editorials that suggest Afghans see Pakistan as the true culprit behind domestic instability. “Afghan papers blame Pakistan,” *BBC News*. 21 June 2005: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4115140.stm.

“RIGHT TO RULE”

Key Phrases, Symbols, or Images

- **Pata Khazana** (“Hidden Treasure”): Pashto manuscript thought to be written during the early 18th century that contains an anthology of Pashto poetry dating back to the 8th century, it is seen as an important collection of Pashtun culture.
- **Sulaiman Mountains**: The traditional homeland of the Pashtuns, the Sulaiman Mountains are a mountain range in Zabul province in Afghanistan and northern Baluchistan province of Pakistan.
- **Durand Line**: The border between Pakistan and Afghanistan set by the British Empire in 1893, which Afghanistan rejects. The border remains a palpable symbol of foreign attempts to divide or weaken the Pashtuns.
- **Qais Abdur Rashid**: Born in the 6th century, Qais is the legendary ancestor of the Pashtun people and the progenitor of all Pashtun tribes. He is also claimed to be the first ethnic Pashtun to travel to Mecca and Medina.
- **Ahmad Shah Durrani**: A Durrani Pashtun, Ahmad Shah united Pashtun tribes under the Durrani Empire in 1747 and is regarded as the father of modern Afghanistan.
- **Abdur Rahman Khan**: The Pashtun Emir of Afghanistan from 1880-1901, Abdur Rahman is praised as a strong ruler who reunited Afghanistan following the devastation of the Second Anglo-Afghan War.

- **“They get the dollars, we get the bullets”:** Phrase used by Pashtuns critical of the Kabul government to describe Tajiks who get money (dollars) via preferential access to foreign aid, and Pashtuns who are subject to airstrikes and raids (bullets) conducted against the Taliban, but concentrated in Pashtun lands.
- **“Panjshir-zai”:** Derisive nickname for President Karzai by critical Pashtuns, refers to the Tajik Northern Alliance commanders (“Panjshiris,” for their base in the Panjshir Valley) that fill security and intelligence posts in the Karzai administration.
- **Amrullah Saleh resignation:** Saleh, the Tajik head of the National Directorate for Security, resigned in June 2010 reportedly due to opposition over President Karzai’s plan to negotiate with Taliban leaders. President Karzai replaced him with the Pashtun Ibrahim Spinzada in what was seen by some as an overture to Pashtuns.

Quotations

1. “History of the Mohamaden Power in India,” Packard Humanities Institute Persian Texts in Translation: <http://persian.packhum.org/persian/main?url=pf%3Ffile%3D06901021%26ct%3D10>.
2. “Afghan rebel leader calls for pull-out of foreign troops to end crisis,” *Afghan Islamic Press* via www.opensource.gov. 6 October 2008: SAP20081006950044.
3. “The Kuchi-Hazara Conflict, Again,” Afghanistan Analysts Network. 17 May 2010: <http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=764>.
4. Monitor 360 interview with Rebecca Zimmerman (RAND Corporation), 24 November 2010.

Sources

Audience Segment

- Selig Harrison of the Center for International Policy described the importance of understanding the perceptions of Pashtuns or Tajiks regarding Afghan issues, rather than constructing a false pan-Afghan perspective. Monitor 360 interview with Selig Harrison (Center for International Policy), 23 November 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Barmak Pazhwak describes this master narrative as used and manipulated by “Pashtun fundamentalists,” adding that the majority of Pashtuns are content to live with other ethnic groups. Monitor 360 interview with Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- Pashtuns in Afghanistan vary in their adherence to Pashtun Nationalist views and their subsequent end goals for the Pashtun population of Afghanistan. A 2010 analysis of Pashtun ethnic nationalism describes a continuum among Pashtuns “from a very localistic, village level orientation, to agitation for a nation-state,” and adds, “There is a strong case to be made for Pashtun ethnic nationalism, evidenced by long standing campaign for the creation of an independent Pashtunistan.” For more on the origins of Pashtun nationalism, see: “Pashtun Tribalism and Ethnic Nationalism,” Tribal Analysis Center. March 2010: <http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com/PDF-TAC/Pashtun%20Tribalism%20and%20Ethnic%20Nationalism.pdf>.

Master Narrative

- This master narrative was described by multiple Afghanistan experts in Monitor 360 interviews. Monitor 360 interviews with Ben Sheppard (Potomac Institute for Policy Studies), 17 September 2010; Ahmad Idrees Rahmani (Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies), 29 September 2010; Selig Harrison (Center for International Policy), 23 November 2010; Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010; Rebecca Zimmerman (RAND Corporation), 24 November 2010; Yama Torabi (Integrity Watch Afghanistan), 2 December 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Ahmad Idrees Rahmani described this narrative as a Pashtun interpretation of their history that ignores Uzbek and Tajik history in the region. Barmak Pazhwak of the United States Institute of Peace added that Pashtuns are creating a narrative to explain five thousand years of history. Monitor 360 interviews with Ahmad Idrees Rahmani (Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies), 29 September 2010; Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- Historical complaints about foreigners supporting minorities in order to suppress Pashtuns were mentioned by Afghanistan expert Selig Harrison in a Monitor 360 interview. Monitor 360 interview with Selig Harrison (Center for International Policy), 23 November 2010.
- Yama Torabi of Integrity Watch Afghanistan described the 2010 parliamentary elections, where many non-Pashtuns won in Pashtun-heavy areas, as evidence to this narrative’s subscribers that their position in the Afghan government is being marginalized. Monitor 360 interview with Yama Torabi (Integrity Watch Afghanistan), 2 December 2010.

- Subscribers to this narrative point to the fact that the first references to “Afghans” referred only to Pashtuns as proof that the Pashtuns are the only group with a legitimate claim to rule Afghanistan. While the exact anthropological origins are unclear, the concept that “Pashtun” and “Afghan” refer to the same people is still a powerful component of Pashtun nationalist ideology. Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*. Wiley-Blackwell. 2002. Print. P. 18.
- Robert Crews and Amin Tarzi describe elements of this narrative in their book on the Taliban insurgency: “Many Pashtuns have entertained the idea that Afghanistan is their land, where non-Pashtuns may live but do not fully belong.” Robert Crews and Amin Tarzi (eds.), *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*. Harvard University Press. 2008. Print. P. 24.
- An important component of this narrative is that the Pashtuns were politically unified in a strong governance structure before the imposition of the British Raj on the Indian subcontinent. Subscribers to this narrative believe that Pashtun kings founded an Afghanistan that included 40,000 square miles of Pashtun territory in what is now Pakistan, that was lost when British forces defeated Pashtuns in 1847 and instituted a border, the Durand Line, that was an attempt to divide and weaken the Pashtuns. Afghan governments have consistently refused to recognize the Durand Line as the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan. “Pakistan’s Ethnic Fault Line,” *Washington Post*. 11 May 2009: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/10/AR2009051001959.html>.
- Pashtun nationalists resent the disproportionate influence held by the Tajik minority, which they see as a legacy of Tajiks collaborating with the occupying Americans. “The Pashtun time bomb,” *New York Times*. 1 August 2007: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/01/opinion/01iht-edharrison.1.6936601.html>.
- A 2009 report indicates that ethnic animosities in Kandahar are growing. As a response to the Pashtun right to rule, Pashtuns in northern Afghanistan—where they are a minority among Uzbeks, Turkmen, and Tajiks—are subject to discrimination. Meanwhile Pashtuns in the south feel that the central government is in the hands of non-Pashtuns who are compliant with the will of the United States. This alienation from the central government is a significant factor in the Taliban’s growing traction with Pashtuns in southern Afghanistan. “Rising Tensions in Afghanistan: Dispatch from Kandahar,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 18 August 2009: <http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=23608>.
- Despite a Pashtun president, the Kabul government is viewed in Afghanistan as dominated by Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras, according to *Guardian* columnist William Dalrymple. Dalrymple refers to Karzai as “only a fig leaf of Pashtun window dressing” and says that he allowed NATO to install the Northern Alliance in Kabul and drive out the Pashtun majority. “This is no NATO game but Pakistan’s proxy war with its brother in the south,” *The Guardian*. 1 July 2010: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jul/01/afghanistan-pakistan-proxy-war-with-india>.
- Pashtuns in Kabul organized a protest in July 2010. The protesters’ grievances include discrimination in the education system and public sector, although a report by *The National* of the United Arab Emirates describes the protest as indicative of a larger feeling of Pashtun marginalization since 2001. Protesters are also convinced that President Karzai is merely a Pashtun figurehead in a minority-dominated government. One protester said that the ongoing insurgency is solely about inequality, saying, “The government of Afghanistan has not paid enough attention to Pashtuns and that is why they started fighting. The fighting going on now is just for Pashtuns to receive their rights; they have no other aims.” “Afghanistan’s Pashtuns fight for their way of life,” *The National* (United Arab Emirates). 12 July 2010: <http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/south-asia/afghanistans-pashtuns-fight-for-their-way-of-life>.
- An open letter from four Pashtun professors lists Pashtun grievances against the Afghan government and United States. The letter includes indiscriminate bombing of Pashtun land, the monopolization of power by the former Northern Alliance, and anti-Pashtun discrimination in the educational system. The letter concluded, “Pashtuns are the founders and defenders of the state. They will not tolerate being ruled by the minorities. . . The history of Afghanistan is full of resistance to foreign imposed and minority control regimes.” “Discrimination against Pashtuns: Letter to President Obama,” Dawat Independent Media Center. 12 June 2010: <http://www.dawatfreemedia.org/english/index.php?mod=article&cat=pashto&article=249>.
- A 2003 ICG report describes the role of ethnic identity in Afghan politics, particularly as it relates to Pashtun alienation. The report highlights how Northern Alliance commanders exploit anti-Pashtun sentiment to unify their Hazara, Uzbek, and Tajik soldiers. Similarly the Taliban exploits anti-Tajik sentiment to encourage insurgents to take arms against a Tajik-dominated government in Kabul. “Afghanistan: The Problem of Pashtun Alienation,” International Crisis Group. 5 August 2003: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/062%20Afghanistan%20The%20Problem%20of%20Pashtun%20Alienation.ashx>.
- Pashtun allegations of bias toward ethnic minorities in the Kabul government center on Tajik control of key security and intelligence posts, which was gained with US support when the Northern Alliance entered Kabul following the fall of the Taliban. Despite President Karzai replacing some Tajiks with Pashtuns, power is still seen as concentrated in Tajik hands, according to Selig Harrison. “Afghanistan’s Tyranny of the Minority,” *New York Times*. 16 August 2009: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/17/opinion/17harrison.html>.
- Ethnic fissures are reportedly emerging within the Afghan National Army, according to a 2010 *New York Times* report. While the composition of the army is roughly proportional with the population as a whole, non-Pashtuns are “believed to do the bulk of the fighting.” “Overture to Taliban Jolts Afghan Minorities,” *New York Times*. 26 June 2010: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/27/world/asia/27afghan.html?pagewanted=1&r=2>.

- For more on the ethnic composition of the Afghan National Army and Pashtun perceptions that it is dominated by Tajiks, see: "Afghan Army Struggles With Ethnic Divisions," *CBS News*. 27 July 2010: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/07/27/world/main6717786.shtml>.
- Pashtuns lost approximately twenty seats during the 2010 parliamentary election. A report refers to the prospect of Pashtuns viewing the parliament as illegitimate due to allegations of widespread fraud and the disproportionately low Pashtun representation. Pashtuns have also raised concerns about instability preventing Afghans from reaching polling locations, primarily in Pashtun areas. One Afghan official said that the final composition of members would be changed to "reflect the realities of Afghanistan." "One in 10 victorious Afghan candidates banned for fraud," *The Guardian*. 21 November 2010: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/21/afghan-candidates-banned-for-fraud>; "Afghanistan poised to announce election results," *AFP*. 23 November 2010: http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hpCxWB_2QWTm7w2aUx2jgONDKgHg?docId=CNG.f4a303f42b231cb67df7e5f82d46d7d9.221.

Significance for Strategic Communicators

- This master narrative makes many Pashtuns hesitant to cooperate with US forces or the Afghan government, and encourages some to join the Taliban insurgency, according to Afghanistan expert Selig Harrison. Monitor 360 interview with Selig Harrison (Center for International Policy), 23 November 2010.
- Afghanistan expert Barmak Pazhwak describes the lack of political parties in the government as a source of Pashtun resentment. According to Pazhwak, the international community suppresses Pashtuns from organizing under a political party, contributing to their underrepresentation in parliament. Monitor 360 interview with Barmak Pazhwak (United States Institute of Peace), 24 November 2010.
- For more on Pashtun Nationalist resentment toward US policies in Afghanistan, including attacks on Pashtun land and support of ethnic minorities in the Afghan government, see: "Afghanistan: The Problem of Pashtun Alienation," International Crisis Group. 5 August 2003: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/062%20Afghanistan%20The%20Problem%20of%20Pashtun%20Alienation.ashx>.
- Supporting the Pashtuns may increase anti-US sentiment and fuel flames of secessionism in the north, according to a December 2010 *Asia Times* column. The column also recommends rapprochement with Tajiks due to increasing Pashtun hostility toward the United States and the political expediency of working with the north. "The other conflict in Afghanistan," *Asia Times*. 1 December 2010: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/LL01Df04.html.
- In a 2010 editorial, Selig Harrison describes the installation of a new government in Kabul as a "clique of Tajik generals seizing the key security posts in the new government" with US support. Harrison also recommends support for President Karzai to keep Tajiks in check and avoid the appearance that the United States continues to oppose Pashtun interests, which could strengthen the Taliban. "A Smart Pashtun Play," *Newsweek*. 6 July 2010: <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/07/06/a-smart-pashtun-play.html>.
- In February 2010, Army Major General David Hogg mentioned that the Afghan National Army's ethnic composition is a "very sensitive issue" and said that the Army needed more Pashtuns from the south to meet recruiting quotas, maintain the intended ethnic composition, and continue to counter Taliban operations. "Afghan Army Lacks Enough Pashtuns," *AOL News*. 19 February 2010: <http://www.aolnews.com/world/article/afghan-army-lacks-enough-pashtuns/19363994>.

Significance for Analysts

- Pashtun politicians' alternating use of Pashtun or Afghan imagery and language depending on the audience was explained by Afghanistan expert Rebecca Zimmerman. Monitor 360 interview with Rebecca Zimmerman (RAND Corporation), 24 November 2010.
- Gilles Dorronsoro describes Taliban attempts to broaden the insurgency by attracting non-Pashtun militants who share an ideological devotion. Doing so requires a balance on the part of the Taliban, as they still must capitalize on Pashtun alienation and resentment to draw volunteers from their Pashtun base in southern Afghanistan. "Rising Tensions in Afghanistan: Dispatch from Kandahar," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 18 August 2009: <http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=23608>.
- *Guardian* columnist William Dalrymple describes the conflict in Afghanistan as a Pashtun rebellion against a regime dominated by Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras, continuing due to Pashtun grievances over being excluded from the Afghan government. "This is no Nato game but Pakistan's proxy war with its brother in the south," *The Guardian*. 1 July 2010: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jul/01/afghanistan-pakistan-proxy-war-with-india>.







For more information about the Master Narratives platform, please contact Open Source Center at MasterNarratives@rccb.osis.gov.

