

**Cognitivism, Prospect Theory and Foreign Policy Change:  
A Comparative Analysis of the Politics of Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Afghanistan**

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## **Abstract**

This article investigates the cognitive limitations on policy change in counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts by examining why American decision-makers failed to revise their government strategy substantially while fighting the insurgency in Afghanistan in 2003-2014 and why their British counterparts were more successful in adjusting their policies in the Malayan insurgency in 1948-1954. Unlike most of the counterinsurgency (COIN) literature that concentrates on military strategy and tactics, the analysis of government policy-making in Malaya holds some important political lessons for American leaders today despite differences between the insurgencies in Afghanistan and British Malaya. As a response to the criticism of COIN studies in general that they lack theoretical guidance, this article utilizes an integrated cognitivist-prospect theory framework. It is argued that some of the COIN literature mistakenly suggests that a more difficult strategic situation was primarily responsible for American failure in Afghanistan. Instead, American decision-makers faced a more difficult task *cognitively* than their British counterparts, as policy change in Afghanistan would have required greater ideational change. American principals were much more attached to their beliefs emotionally, had no alternative problem representation, and had to shift between frames in order to engineer a response that was more in line with events on the ground in Afghanistan. Regarding prospect theory, findings indicate that gains frames appear to be unhelpful in monitoring progress until catastrophic failure endangers the reference point, and that decision-makers often have more than one reference point to attune their policies to, which often results in suboptimal choices with regard to at least one reference point.

Key words: counterinsurgency, foreign policy change, Malaya, Afghanistan, United States, United Kingdom

## 1. Introduction

The United States entered Afghanistan in 2001 under the presumption that American presence would be short-lived, an alternative government was available, and no major US force build-up was necessary. Although Taliban activity was on the increase after 2003, it took three to five years until the Bush Administration acknowledged the failure of its initial policy choices. US inaction in Afghanistan is often explained by the fact that the Bush Administration gave priority to Iraq, which reduced both the attention and the willingness to deal with Afghanistan sooner.<sup>1</sup> Yet, this is hardly a complete explanation of the policies regarding Afghanistan. It certainly cannot account for the limited effort the Obama Administration undertook, which resulted in some tactical gains but still leaves the future of Afghanistan uncertain as after the withdrawal of US combat troops.<sup>2</sup> Thus, this article asks why and how governments recognize—or not—foreign policy failure and change their policies. It contends that the rigidity or flexibility of policies is cognitively motivated to a great extent and, thus, is rooted in the beliefs that decision-makers hold at the beginning of such conflicts.

This article uses a comparative approach, contrasting America's Afghanistan policy from the outbreak of the insurgency in 2003 until 2014 with British policy against Communist insurgents in Malaya between 1948 and 1954. Malaya has become a standard point of reference in most counterinsurgency (COIN) studies.<sup>3</sup> However, the COIN literature overwhelmingly focuses on *strategy and tactics*<sup>4</sup> – an approach whose applicability to Afghanistan COIN experts have rightfully questioned. COIN doctrine is a set of broad principles whose particular adaptation is heavily context dependent.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, comparative and theory-driven analyses of the *political* processes are scarce. While transferring any lessons into a different country and era should be done with caution,<sup>6</sup> Malaya has important *political* lessons to offer for more recent COIN campaigns such as Afghanistan. British policy-making in Malaya is particularly instructive, because it suggests that insurgents can be fought successfully even after initial policy failure if decision-makers re-examine and restructure their beliefs.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, policy-making in *London* during the Malayan emergency is a useful analytical tool in

explicating the problems of America's Afghan policy, as the two cases share important political dilemmas as well as contextual similarities.

Similarly to Afghanistan, Malaya was a protracted first conflict over opposing ways of life following foreign policy restructuring. Other similarities include pre-conflict support to the present enemy, severe constraints due to military commitment and lack of resources elsewhere in the world, a multi-national campaign, the eruption of an insurgency after shortly (re-)establishing control over the territory, and constraints of another foreign policy event (the recognition of Red China in 1950<sup>8</sup> vs. relations with Pakistan). In addition, once the insurgency occurred, the two states also faced much the same challenges: fighting an insurgency that was partly the result of their own mistaken policies, preparing the territory for independent governance during which consent had to be won for the presence of non-local forces, and creating legitimate local capacity had to be created.

Admittedly, the Bush Administration may have faced a more difficult task on the ground than the Attlee government did more than fifty years earlier.<sup>9</sup> Yet, to contend, as Gentile's popular reinterpretation of the Malayan emergency does,<sup>10</sup> that the British could have hardly failed in Malaya is an argument based on hindsight that does not reflect the alarm that spread through Whitehall in the early phase of the Malayan effort. Even if such alarm was overreaction,<sup>11</sup> which is a seriously questionable proposition, government *perception* is as important as reality for cognitively motivated studies such as this article.

A combined framework of cognitive psychology and prospect theory is applied here to foster heretofore sparse theoretical thinking about COIN campaigns. The more thorough reflection that theories can offer about conditions that foster and hinder the eruption and successful combating of insurgencies is important inasmuch as insurgencies are likely to remain a permanent feature of international politics.<sup>12</sup> On the theoretical level, this article adapts prospect theory to the analysis of foreign policy change, which has received only sporadic attention so far.

Several background assumptions are in order. First, this article presumes that political decisions are important drivers for policy change, defining military missions and fighting insurgencies successfully.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the focus is on the *political* – and not the *strategic* – aspects of the cases.

Second, it is assumed that states are *not* unitary actors: minority opinions and contrasting perspectives exist in government, and domestic politics play a role in international relations. Finally, it is assumed that in places where an insurgency is brewing, counterterrorism is not a sufficient policy option: it disregards the importance of the civilian population in beating insurgencies.<sup>14</sup> Instead, a counterinsurgency strategy needs to be executed.<sup>15</sup>

In discussing how and why governments recognize policy failures, two facets of the policy-making process will be analysed: (1) the governments' role in the eruption of the insurgencies and their initial responses to them and (2) the process by which policy failure was recognized and how it led to policy change. The analysis relies on government documents, memoirs, and historical and political accounts. While quality sources are in abundance regarding Malaya, accounts with respect to Afghanistan are, unfortunately, more sporadic, self-justificatory and biased.

This article finds that British policy was more susceptible to change because a smaller degree of emotional attachment to ideas and the possibility of simply reordering existing schemas meant less strenuous cognitive barriers for decision-makers to overcome. The British government's task was also easier at the cognitive level in that its world view suggested a clear reference point for Malaya, and it could operate within the same (loss) frame throughout the examined period (1948-1951). In case of Afghanistan, a shift in both world view and framing would have been necessary. While the US government found a reference point – *albeit* belatedly – and changed its framing and, partially, its belief system, it never came to reflect on its goals and core beliefs the way in which the British did. This article suggests that the gains frame can create additional cognitive barriers and is not helpful in finding a well-defined reference point or adequately monitoring progress.

Additionally, the analysis of the Attlee cabinet and the Bush and Obama Administrations shows that decision-makers operate with a complex set of beliefs, some of which are more closely tied to the actual situation than others. As a result, decision-makers may have to juggle multiple reference points, as demonstrated by the confounding effect of Iraq between 2006 and 2008 and, more emphatically, that of domestic politics during the Obama Administration. In both cases, the two reference points suggested

different and conflicting preference ordering as well as different time frames. In such cases, choices are likely to be suboptimal with regard to one reference point (see Bush and Iraq) or both of them. President Obama postponed, but did not prevent, foreign policy losses and minimalized, but did not nullify, prospective domestic losses in popularity. All in all, having more than one reference point and multiple time-horizons opens up exciting, if infinitely complex, analytical opportunities for prospect theory.

## **2. Counterinsurgency, Foreign Policy Change and Cognitivism**

### *2.1. Counterinsurgency*

Due to wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, counterinsurgency studies have flourished of late. Yet, they are primarily concerned with the tactical – or at best, the strategic – level.<sup>16</sup> It is now popular to correct misconceptions about COIN being a distinct kind of warfare,<sup>17</sup> the role of ‘saviour’ generals,<sup>18</sup> or the importance of winning “hearts and minds” in COIN campaigns.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it is common to question the viability of COIN as a tool of imperial policing, as well as its moral desirability,<sup>20</sup> which, though important in debating US grand strategy, bears little scientific relevance.<sup>21</sup>

Several authors, including Gentile, note that the immense focus on the operational level means overlooking the “causes, ideologies, and motives” of interventions.<sup>22</sup> Yet, the relevant *political* decisions, which would help in understanding such factors, are rarely examined in the COIN literature. Only some historically-oriented or politically-motivated accounts of developments in Malaya and Afghanistan deal with the effects of decisions made in *London* and *Washington*, respectively, mostly in the form of single case studies.<sup>23</sup> However, the sanctioning of COIN operations at the political level is important, or else armies are left to fight with very serious restrictions.<sup>24</sup> Thus, any conclusions about the success and viability of COIN operations may be misleading without also examining relevant political decisions.

Finally, few COIN studies use theoretical insights to guide their analysis, and no theoretically based study of causes, ideologies and motivations has been conducted to date. When used, theories – psychological or other – are applied in an *ad hoc* manner.<sup>25</sup> Two rare exceptions are Payne and Gompert, whose respective studies discuss the tactical insights that social psychology and cognitive psychology

have to offer.<sup>26</sup> Finally, Duncanson and Cornish employ feminist discourse analysis to illuminate the gendered nature of soldiers' and journalists' thinking about COIN.<sup>27</sup> However, again, these studies concentrate on the tactical—not the political—level.

## 2.2. *Prospect Theory*

Prospect theory addresses decision-making under risk. It divides the decision-making process into two stages.<sup>28</sup> Before decision-makers evaluate and select between alternatives, they first make sense of the situation, or *frame* it. In this framing phase, people do not define situations in absolute terms, but with regard to a specific reference point. Often the reference point is the *status quo*. Compared to this reference point, the situation falls into the domain of gains – an improvement in the situation – or the domain of losses, i.e. a deterioration of the situation relative to the reference point. Gains and losses have different psychological effects. People value avoiding losses more than achieving gains. Consequently, they will take larger risks and make a bigger effort to avoid or redress losses, while they will behave more cautiously in the domain of gains. Following from people's preoccupation with losses, once a risky option has been selected, decision-makers are likely to stick to it longer than to options selected as a result of a gains frame. However, high-probability outcomes behave differently, as they are tended to be viewed as certainties. The consequence is that the relationship between the decision domain and the risk-taking behaviour is reversed: 'certain' gains encourage risk-taking while 'certain' losses foster risk-aversion.<sup>29</sup>

We know relatively little about how framing happens and how options are defined.<sup>30</sup> So far only emotive factors, historical analogies, and “norms, habits, and expectations” are known to relate to framing.<sup>31</sup> Prospect theory is a theory of individual choice. However, it can also be applied to groups of decision-makers,<sup>32</sup> which allows it to take complex realities, including disagreements among decision-makers, into account.<sup>33</sup> This gives a greater appreciation to the multiple competing schemas and beliefs present in a group setting, which can be possible sources of change. Finally, domestic politics have been incorporated into prospect theory analyses, showing that domestic insecurity and international losses

reinforce each other in encouraging risk-taking, and that domestic politics also lead to difficult political or strategic trade-offs internationally.<sup>34</sup>

Although a few studies have analysed change with the help of prospect theory,<sup>35</sup> only recently did prospect theory garner more theoretical attention in this respect.<sup>36</sup> Several aspects of prospect theory make change possible. As people are sensitive to environmental change, contextual change may trigger changes in framing and preferences.<sup>37</sup> Evaluation of policy in relation to a reference point over time also opens up the possibility of change. With the passage of time (lag time), the reference point is seen from a different perspective, which may lead to the re-evaluation of the situation and the redefinition of the reference point, frames, and policy. Getting closer to the reference point may lead to added gains and, thus, relaxation of policy, while failing to get closer to it may result in a heightened sense of loss and riskier choices. Leaders whose earlier decisions result in losses are particularly likely to try to recoup their losses.<sup>38</sup>

### *2.3. Cognitive psychology and change*

Cognitive psychology studies how human information processing diverges from the requirements of rationality. It focuses on the role of prior beliefs and norms in our attempts to make sense of the world around us. Whether to fill gaps in our knowledge or process large amounts of information, we interpret new information on the basis of old information. We store large clusters of interrelated concepts (schemas and beliefs) in our minds, which we create on the basis of past experience and readily apply to new situations. When more than one schema fits a given situation, we use the schema that is easiest to recall, such as the schema that relates to a more recent experience or that is more salient for us for some other reason.<sup>39</sup>

Schemas do not yield easily to change. First, changing them requires some – often conscious – understanding of their inadequacy, but they are most often used unconsciously and survive in the face of *others* pointing out their shortcomings. The second problem is human tolerance for discrepant facts.<sup>40</sup> A problem recognized is often initially attributed to unforeseen developments or bad execution, and only

later may decision-makers consider rethinking the problem. Third, the framing of a situation is difficult to change unless another acceptable problem representation is available.<sup>41</sup> Fourth, depending on their generality, some beliefs are more difficult to change than others. Since world views and principled beliefs are more deeply rooted and affect our thinking profoundly, they change with more difficulty and less frequency than causal beliefs about cause-effect relationships. However, when they do change, they result in more sweeping changes.<sup>42</sup>

How exactly schemas change is not entirely clear, but two possible mechanisms have been identified so far. Change may be the result of one shattering piece of information that dislodges prior beliefs. Alternatively, and this is a better depiction of what happened with regard to Malaya and Afghanistan, change can come about as a result of the accumulation of a great amount of information that does not fit prior beliefs.<sup>43</sup> This may then result in a drastic change in the schema or lead to so many little changes that the original schema gives way to a new one over time.<sup>44</sup> However, change may not require changing the schema: the reordering of existing beliefs is sometimes enough to produce a shift in policy.<sup>45</sup> The cognitive requirements for change by reordering are less cumbersome than by replacing one schema with another.

Foreign policy change is also difficult.<sup>46</sup> Similarly to belief change, foreign policy change is conceptualized by the degree of its comprehensiveness. Because of the cognitive framework applied here, this study concentrates on goal change, i.e. the shift of the original policy purpose or problem representation.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, if not accompanied with policy change, variation in troop levels is of minor importance for this analysis.

### **3. Initial Reaction to the Outbreak of Insurgencies**

#### *3.1. Malaya*

The Communist insurgency took the British by surprise because of their mistaken conceptualization of Malayan affairs as a primarily colonial problem. British government policy for

Malaya was guided by a competition between two foreign policy schemas: its old world view, imperialism, and the new one, anti-Communism, which had been adopted as a policy by the government<sup>48</sup> but had not yet replaced imperialism in the minds of the decision-makers. This led decision-makers to underestimate the Communist insurgents, who had fought side by side with the British against the Japanese to regain control of Malaya during World War Two. They were still regarded as friends: London saw them wanting the same thing as the British in post-war Malaya.<sup>49</sup> Threats had been expected from the potentially dissatisfied Malay community as a result of the constitution-making process for a would-be independent Malaya but not from the Chinese minority that was sympathetic to Communism.<sup>50</sup>

The government was obviously aware of growing Communist atrocities prior to the outbreak of the insurgency, but prioritizing imperialism and seeing the Communists as former comrades resulted in the British discounting troubling information rather than adapting their beliefs. Decision-makers painted a rather bleak picture of Communist activities and were expecting more serious trouble.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, they discounted alarming information as overreaction caused by the fixation of the colonial administration on Communists or as melodrama created by succinct reports.<sup>52</sup>

When atrocities broke out, Britain immediately recognized the existence of a problem, but this did not lead to a re-examination of prior beliefs. Principals used the same colonialism-dominated world view to frame the situation and prescribe a solution. Colonialism cast events in a framework of considerable loss. Though perceived as strategically unimportant, Malaya was a dollar-earning colony whose income was economically vital for a fragile British economy.<sup>53</sup> Most importantly, Malaya's importance was framed in terms of Britain's national identity as a colonial power. Britain felt a moral duty to lead its colonies to independence and transfer independence when colonial peoples were judged ready for it.<sup>54</sup>

Anti-Communism remained important for the Attlee government only insofar as it upset colonial policy.<sup>55</sup> A Communist Malaya was unacceptable, because the British would also have lost the initiative of granting independence on their own terms, failing to carry out their obligations to Malaya.<sup>56</sup> Even if less important for principals' thinking, anti-Communism counselled for a similar appreciation of the

situation as colonialism. The government found that expected losses were further magnified internationally because Britain's reputation was also at stake: Malaya was the only place where Britain bore primary responsibility for fighting Communism and it enjoyed priority over all other global commitments.<sup>57</sup>

Unlike the United States' views with regard to Afghanistan, initial British appraisal of the situation helped to unequivocally define—i.e. to reaffirm—the reference point for Malaya. As before, the reference point was set in the future. With the passage of time the situation in Malaya was to be measured with regard to attaining the previously accepted objective of being able to *grant* Malaya independence, under a system of government that the British found best for Malaya, rather than *succumb* to the Communists' terms and demand for independence.

Viewing policies for Malaya in terms of imperial policy-making prescribed a legal-political solution with a minor military component to reinforce the police.<sup>58</sup> Despite different ideational roots, initial policy reactions bore similarities to American counterterrorism,<sup>59</sup> as they placed the problem outside mainstream Malayan politics and failed to notice the (Chinese) population's role in strengthening the insurgents. The aim was to maintain regular political life in Malaya.

In line with loss frames that counsel for risk-taking, the Attlee government perceived such a choice as very risky. Strategically, the troop increase left Britain without reserves for a year and, thus, unable to react to any additional developments elsewhere.<sup>60</sup> Internationally, the Cabinet feared being denounced as ruthless imperialists who found a convenient excuse to desist from their commitment to Malaya's independence.<sup>61</sup> Domestic risk assessment only reinforced such views. The chosen policy had the potential to wreck the remnants of Labour's unity because of the rank-and-file's great sympathy for leftist movements.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the government—mistakenly—anticipated public uproar at home at the prohibition of the Malayan Communist Party.<sup>63</sup>

Unfortunately, imperialism and a legalistic attitude that flowed therefrom led to the misconceptualization of the situation in two ways. First, there was no balance or consistency between political and military components of their campaign. While good governance and a political approach are

foundations of effective counterinsurgency,<sup>64</sup> the British took this approach to the extreme, leaving little space for military strategy and creating an illusion of normalcy. As a result, one *ad hoc* solution followed another, and troops were engaged in an inefficient manner and subordinated to a badly reputed police.<sup>65</sup> The strategy that emerged on the ground resembled American counterterrorism in Afghanistan in that it focused on removing terrorists.<sup>66</sup>

Second, because the situation was viewed as a matter of colonial administration and policing in which Britain had considerable experience, the chances of success of the chosen policy were judged in unwarrantedly optimistic terms regarding both the length and ease of the effort. The situation was confidently described in government circles as a small guerrilla problem that would be easily solved in a few months.<sup>67</sup> In contrast with this, a world view dominated by anti-Communism would have prescribed different conclusions, since principals would have already realized that fighting Communism was a serious long-term problem with few things to be sanguine about.<sup>68</sup> The corresponding policy prescription should have also been more sober, forceful and perhaps of larger magnitude.

### 3.2. Afghanistan

The Bush Administration failed to prevent, and then acknowledge, the outbreak of the insurgency because its emerging new policy – the War on Terror (WOT) –, its prior beliefs about nation-building, and the lessons of Soviet and British fiascos recommended extreme caution in Afghanistan. First, although the WOT was borne out of a loss frame (i.e. as a reaction to lives lost and an embodiment of America's subjective loss of security and invulnerability after 9/11),<sup>69</sup> it cast policies *for* Afghanistan in a gains frame. Enemy-centric counterterrorism had nothing to gain from deeper involvement in Afghan politics as long as America could hunt down terrorists.<sup>70</sup>

The governments' causal beliefs regarding the lessons of the Soviet and British failures in Afghanistan and nation-building reinforced cautiousness that the gains frame suggested regarding large-scale US presence in Afghanistan. It did so by casting substantial long-term American involvement in Afghan politics into the domain of certain losses. Decision-makers interpreted the past experience of great

powers in a way that the massive commitment of ground troops and long-term engagement were recipes for certain loss, *vis-à-vis* both the *status quo* and the future.<sup>71</sup> Thus, *certain* loss as well as a gains frame counselled for caution, judging anything to be done for the local population too expensive and too risky. Consequently, unlike the British who worked from a loss frame, US principals considered the risk of sending a large number of troops to provide security, which would erode America's ability to act elsewhere, prohibitively high.<sup>72</sup>

The Administration's view on nation-building supported, or perhaps even predetermined, such an interpretation. The President and some of his subordinates came into power on the premise that the United States should do no nation-building.<sup>73</sup> While the destruction of the twin towers gave the Bush Administration the leverage to overturn any previous policies,<sup>74</sup> the belief in the "no nation-building" thesis proved too strong to be discarded despite the realization that the logical next step in Afghanistan was nation-building, and on a large scale.<sup>75</sup> Finally, domestic politics further strengthened the Administration's visceral objection to nation-building, because nation-building was feared to threaten support for the WOT at home.<sup>76</sup>

Consequently, the US misjudged its own importance for the future of Afghanistan – the Secretary of State's objections in 2002 notwithstanding<sup>77</sup> –, denying a leading role in reconstruction efforts and allowing Afghanistan to quickly fall off the top of the policy agenda.<sup>78</sup> At the same time, the appraisal of the situation led the US to miscalculate the ability of its allies and the private sector to do nation-building on their own as much of the job was leased out to allies and private companies.<sup>79</sup>

Worse, while there was a reference point associated with the WOT (i.e. the ability to hunt down terrorists), the Bush Administration had no clearly defined and measurable reference point or goals<sup>80</sup> for Afghanistan itself, which would take until 2005 to work out. This made the government misplace its concerns and optimism, worrying too much about the war effort and too little about post-war developments.<sup>81</sup>

In the absence of a reference point, the US lacked precise benchmarks for progress, and thus the growing insurgency could only raise modest concern. The government was aware of the insurgency from

2003 (even if its existence was denied publicly),<sup>82</sup> but not before the Taliban was already operating an alternative government in Kandahar province (2006) would American decision-makers finally grasp the seriousness of the threat. In the meantime, modest concern led to no major re-examination of beliefs held and only a short-term course correction was effected, as part of which the Bush Administration slid into increased reconstruction efforts despite its continuing objection to nation-building. Lacking an overall plan to fight the insurgency, a light-footprint counterinsurgency strategy, in itself a contradiction in terms, was worked out locally. However, and somewhat reminiscent of consequences in Malaya, a lack of coordination and overlapping projects resulted in only modest results.<sup>83</sup> Worse, troop withdrawal, transfer of power to NATO, and decreasing funding signalled disinterest again as well as a return to an enemy-centric approach in 2005—exactly when the insurgents' efforts multiplied.<sup>84</sup>

Working out a goal for Afghanistan on the basis of the WOT or discarding deeply held beliefs about nation-building could have helped in recognizing the necessity of larger troop presence in Afghanistan, but were cognitively too strenuous to achieve. If the government had adopted at least a different interpretation of the Soviet and British fiascos, it could have broken down, or at least softened, cognitive barriers, leading to greater – if unenthusiastic – US participation in reconstruction, and thus the possible prevention of the insurgency and/or more powerful response to it. Indeed, at least two alternative interpretations of the Soviet and British fiascos were available: (1) it was not so much the number of troops that mattered but what they did,<sup>85</sup> and (2) no power vacuum should have been left to make it easy for the Taliban or others to contest for power.<sup>86</sup>

#### **4. Policy Failure and Change**

##### *4.1. Malaya*

Even though at the beginning the British government based its policies on faulty premises, several things would help it toward recognizing the failure of its policies and thinking: (1) the government defined a clear reference point, which contributed to the efficient assessment of developments in the future; (2) this reference point judged Malaya important for Britain; (3) an alternative world view, or

problem representation, was already at the disposal of the decision-makers; and (4) the government did not have to abandon its loss frame, which made it particularly sensitive to negative developments. Thus, the cognitive requirements for recognizing failure were much more modest than those American decision-makers would face with regard to Afghanistan.

The British government grasped its unconscious self-deception gradually, as evidence of it accumulated. There were only two components of its schema that had to be discarded – short-termism and optimism –, a relatively easy task given that neither were strongly held beliefs or crucial components of the government’s world view. Nonetheless, it took two years for it to acknowledge failure. First, in September 1948, still sanguine about the prospects, the Colonial Secretary described progress as *slow*, but steady.<sup>87</sup> By mid-1949, decision-makers started to understand that they were not facing a brief effort.<sup>88</sup> Finally, in February 1950, the British government accepted that the anti-Communist campaign would be a lengthy one.<sup>89</sup>

The constant monitoring of the situation in light of the reference point also made the government reassess its views about the success of its policies. The first crack in the cabinet’s sanguine approach appeared in March 1949 when, in a letter to the Prime Minister, Secretary of State for War Emanuel Shinwell asserted that the facts—an increasing number of atrocities and casualties—did not support the optimistic atmosphere about improvements in Malaya.<sup>90</sup> However, not until Shinwell repeated his policy assessment a year later, this time calling the situation “grave,” did the government finally share his assessment.<sup>91</sup> When it did, however, it also realized that it based its policy on the wrong schema. They understood that they were victims of

“a certain tactical distortion (...) because of the way we formulated our task as the clearing up of gangs of bandits. This may have led to the concentration on jungle patrols, etc. which inevitably pay comparatively small dividends for the effort involved (...) The task is to break the power of the MCP.”<sup>92</sup>

In other words, the task was not only to uphold good governance, but to fight Communism and (also) provide adequate security by confronting rather than ignoring the Communists. Thus, the government did not have to discard its deeply held identity rooted in imperialism. It was enough to reorder its schemas and bring anti-Communism into the foreground while relegating imperialism to a secondary role.

The policy review that the Prime Minister ordered in the wake of Shinwell's second letter corroborated Shinwell's views, pushing the Cabinet deeper into the loss frame.<sup>93</sup> As a result, the government committed itself to additional risks by moving toward a full-scale counterinsurgency strategy with a heavier military component and a more population-centred approach. It also continued to monitor the situation, which took a turn for the worse before starting to improve. The outgoing government was aware of these problems, but was at a loss as to what else could be done.<sup>94</sup>

After entering office, the Churchill government, which was more ideologically wedded to imperialism and anti-Communism, reaffirmed the Attlee government's understanding of the situation and attendant policies, including long-term commitment.<sup>95</sup> Long-term commitment helped the Churchill government to interpret domestic and international risk factors – military overstretch and the durability of public willingness to support the military effort in Malaya – and led to a redoubling of efforts. Thus, similarly to President Obama, the Churchill Cabinet was resolved to bring the military campaign to an end as soon as possible, but, in contrast with the Obama Administration, they wanted to do so only after attaining London's original reference point and without putting a deadline on continuing efforts.<sup>96</sup>

#### *4.2. Afghanistan*

The cognitive breakthrough that characterized British policy-making did not occur in the United States. It is important to emphasize that it was not ignorance that prevented decision-makers from changing their goals. For example, Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld was clearly aware of what good policy-making required, as well as the need to address facts and assumptions and have a firm reference point.<sup>97</sup> Rather, the inability to affect major changes was, to a great extent, due to decision-makers' pre-existing schemas<sup>98</sup> and to significantly more strenuous cognitive requirements than in the British case. To

find a solution for Afghanistan, principals would have had to (1) modify their framing, (2) abandon or heavily adapt their counterterrorism schema, (3) discard their deeply held views about nation-building and (4) change their interpretation of the lessons of Soviet failure in the absence of alternative or competing schema. In the end, decision-makers were able to abandon the gains frame, their early optimism, and short-termism. However, principals tolerated a high level of cognitive dissonance throughout the process, and were only able to discard their views on nation-building outside the Afghan context, that is, in relation to Iraq.<sup>99</sup>

To be able to monitor progress and, thus, recognize failure, American decision-makers first had to clarify their reference point, which happened gradually, and not until the summer of 2003 when the insurgency had already started.<sup>100</sup> The October 16, 2001 Afghan strategy still rejected any long-term US role in post-war Afghanistan besides economic aid.<sup>101</sup> Nonetheless, the concern in the Department of Defence (DOD) for strategy and measures of success demonstrated an active search for a quantifiable reference point. The first step in this direction was made in December 2001, when failure was defined as Afghanistan turning bad by spring 2002 and the warlords – but not the Taliban/Al Qaeda – engaging in a civil war.<sup>102</sup> A clear reference point would emerge in July 2003 when lack of success, including renewed civil war, was defined in relation to the WOT and as undermining counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan.<sup>103</sup> The Bush Administration reached for a very general foreign policy schema (i.e. America's self-identity as a pursuer of democracy around the globe), deciding that a moderate and democratic Afghanistan with a government capable of controlling and governing its territory, implementing plans for economic development, and contributing to the WOT was desirable. With this Washington, unlike the British whose aim for Malaya was to have good government, but not democracy,<sup>104</sup> settled on an impossibly broad end-state,<sup>105</sup> which made detailed planning difficult.<sup>106</sup>

After finding their reference point, US principals still took a year longer to identify policy failure as their British counterparts had. First, the new-found reference point played an important role in starting to erode principals' undue optimism and their belief in short-termism, leading to a great deal of inconsistency in government appreciation of the situation in the next two years. In the course of 2003-

2004 both Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Rice acknowledged that Afghanistan would be a “long hard slog,” and that “it was going to be a long struggle,”<sup>107</sup> but early exit was still sought until 2005.<sup>108</sup> Despite early worries in DOD and the recognition of the enormity of the task by Rice in 2004,<sup>109</sup> the Afghan project was generally thought to be in good shape until 2005.<sup>110</sup>

Accumulating unfavourable evidence, as well as the shock of the devastating attack on Navy SEALs – the first significant encounter of US troops with insurgents, resulting in the death of 19 American servicemen – started to cast major doubts on the prevailing understanding of the situation in 2005.<sup>111</sup> The transition from a gains frame to a loss frame was steady but still took an additional year. The recognition of failure of the government’s earlier course correction, “accelerated success”<sup>112</sup> and of police training in summer 2005<sup>113</sup> were important steps in this direction. Marin Strmecki’s 2006 policy review and Ambassador Neumann’s October 2006 warning only confirmed decision-makers fears as they testified to a deteriorating security situation and increasingly powerful Taliban presence in Southern Afghanistan.<sup>114</sup> By the end of 2006, Rumsfeld,<sup>115</sup> the intelligence community, Rice,<sup>116</sup> and President Bush all subscribed to a loss frame with the President insisting in the fall of 2006 that “we cannot lose Afghanistan,”<sup>117</sup> where by then the US already accepted a long-term role.<sup>118</sup>

Unfortunately for Afghanistan, the Bush Administration had to cope with two reference points in the WOT, and accepted a similar loss frame regarding the Iraqi project with a more urgent time horizon.<sup>119</sup> Unable to sustain parallel military campaigns, reminiscent of British experience with troop shortages between 1948 and 1950,<sup>120</sup> the US only effected an “adjustment” in Afghanistan, which in reality was more of the same without any reflection on beliefs.<sup>121</sup> Yet, developments in Iraq also had a positive effect for Afghanistan, as it was able to break the cognitive barrier against further troop commitments abroad—a step for which the Afghan context was inadequate, because every time a policy recommendation had required large American military deployment to Afghanistan, an alternative route had been suggested.<sup>122</sup> It was no different even in late 2006 after a multi-year counterinsurgency campaign was proposed.<sup>123</sup>

In 2007 and 2008, inaction pushed the Bush Administration further away from its reference point,

as policies regarding Afghanistan came to be perceived as *catastrophic* failure.<sup>124</sup> By November 2008 the government's most optimistic assessment was being in a stalemate. Worse, in 2008, not only a democratic Afghanistan, but the WOT, which was seen as vital for US national security, was perceived as being in danger. But (repeated) recommendations for classic counterinsurgency measures came too late,<sup>125</sup> as the Bush Administration's term of office expired.

The Obama Administration showed continuity in the appraisal of the situation, as principals subscribed to the idea of a long-term security commitment<sup>126</sup> and reaffirmed the Bush Administration's solid loss frame. The United States was without a comprehensive strategy, Al Qaeda was as strong as ever and Afghanistan could once again become a staging base for global terrorism. Losses were considered as certain if the *status quo* prevailed, since current policies were judged to be a recipe for failure.<sup>127</sup> To mend this discrepancy between certain or highly probable prospective losses and current policy, President Obama started with readjusting the reference point in spring 2009. He reaffirmed the importance of the WOT, that is, the ability of the United States to go after Al Qaeda in Afghanistan,<sup>128</sup> and cut back on goals regarding the future of Afghanistan. Democracy as a goal was replaced with establishing good governance. Such an early clarification of the reference point also made the establishment of a regular review process and, with it, the monitoring of progress toward or away from the reference point possible.<sup>129</sup>

Despite similarity in framing, curbing the goals for Afghanistan was only one way in which the changing of government was less favourable for action in Afghanistan than it had been in Malaya. President Obama had different beliefs and preferences than his predecessor, showing a much stronger concern for the lessons of Vietnam instead of the lessons of Soviet and British interventions, and for domestic politics, which he also believed to be less manipulable.<sup>130</sup> Moving away from a state-centric view that had stood behind the retaliation against Afghanistan for the wrong-doing of a non-state actor was helpful in separating Al Qaeda from the Taliban and treating Afghanistan and Pakistan as a single problem.<sup>131</sup> However, apart from Secretary of Defence Gates, no one consciously considered, but neither did they fully discard, the implications of the Soviet lesson. The concern with having another Vietnam

guided policies (e.g. put a time limit on the Afghan surge), but its applicability was little examined even though the President rejected the analogy publicly.<sup>132</sup>

Concern with domestic politics created an additional reference point that pulled principals toward different preference ordering than the evaluation of international factors. Internationally, both before and after the modification of the reference point, the perception of impending losses in light of the *status quo* remained unchanged, and counterterrorism was judged as inadequate to achieve the desired end-state. Only taking substantial additional risks by engaging in full-scale counterinsurgency with an integrated political-military campaign, rather than the uneven counterinsurgency policy then in practice, was seen as the only viable policy to defend vital interests.<sup>133</sup> However, full-scale COIN was not practicable domestically, because it was perceived to result in a sure loss of the President's support base that would make his re-election impossible. Immediate withdrawal, which would have harmonized with the lessons of both Soviet intervention and the Vietnam War, could have helped the administration avoid loss of support at home, had it not been for the President's campaign pledge of further resources to Afghanistan and for such policy hurting America's vital interests by making the reference point, i.e. the pursuit of counterterrorism operations, unattainable in the short term.<sup>134</sup>

In the end, the Obama Administration chose a compromise solution, that is, a COIN campaign limited in scale and time. However, this was a suboptimal choice in comparison with the domestic and international reference points, mitigating but not abolishing potential losses domestically and, in the short run, internationally. In reality it was a medium-term exit strategy that committed US combat troops and resources to Afghanistan for three to five more years, allowing only for non-combat support operations in the long term.<sup>135</sup> Unsurprisingly, such a choice did not move principals' estimate of success in Afghanistan away from the region of high probability losses as lack of belief in the chosen policy option suggests.<sup>136</sup>

## **5. Conclusion**

Comparing American policies in Afghanistan to British policies in Malaya utilizing an integrated

approach consisting of a blend of cognitivism and prospect theory illustrates the effect of grand policy and related beliefs on a government's ability to act and even to question their own views. The combined imperialism–anti-Communism schema of the British prescribed the frame and reference point for Malaya, while the WOT did no such thing for Afghanistan, at least not until developments started to affect the success of the WOT and placed it into the domain of gains. Recognizing failure and discarding policies that did not work was more difficult for principals who were emotionally attached to their beliefs, as was the case with respect to the Bush Administration's views on "no nation-building." Only failure in Iraq could wreck such beliefs, because decision-makers were more emotionally wedded to the fate of Iraq than even to ideas concerning nation-building.

All in all, the primary obstacle for American decision-makers was not the more difficult strategic environment in Afghanistan as compared with Malaya as Gentile contends,<sup>137</sup> but the much more strenuous cognitive requirements for choosing policies to successfully combat insurgents. American decision-makers had no alternative problem representations the way the British decision-makers had, and instead of simply reordering components of their schema, American principals had to make more substantial adjustments in their beliefs. They also took longer to find a reference point and had to shift from a gains to a loss frame, which made the decision-makers lose additional time. Both British and American decision-makers were only able to make some less strenuous adjustments, including their views on the length and ease of the efforts. This, and the facts that decision-makers in both countries were reluctant to re-examine their views held at the outbreak of the insurgencies and applied schemas that had already been disproven and were wholly inadequate, are sobering reminders of the resilience of the human mind to disconfirming information.

Nonetheless, as the Malayan case demonstrates, change is not impossible. However, because of the serious cognitive limitations, such changes are likely to be of small scale. This makes it vital to define goals realistically and, most importantly, early on, for without a reference point monitoring progress is impossible. Furthermore, US policy-making in Afghanistan strongly questions that, even if the required cognitive changes had occurred, any modern government would have the freedom to engineer the

necessary sweeping changes after 6-7 years of involvement in a conflict.<sup>138</sup> This further accentuates the importance of adequate framing at the beginning. Nonetheless, the early definition of a reference point will assist countries little if their future is not seen vital for a great power, because every time a trade-off is necessary, suboptimal options will be chosen for non-vital allies.

Even if long-term conflict involvement makes sweeping changes difficult, US governments could work harder at increasing their room for manoeuvre by actively lobbying Congress for support<sup>139</sup> and being less fixated on potential domestic losses. Alternatively, a more honest and less optimistic approach about foreseeable difficulties at the beginning would help to prepare the public for possible setbacks and casualties. This may also help principals to make a more balanced – and less doctrinal – initial appraisal of the situation.

The case studies generally support the approach taken in this paper. The Attlee government's policies reaffirm prospect theory's claim that, in a loss framework, additional losses result in further risk-taking. A closer integration of prospect theory and cognitive psychology appears to be a useful approach in analysing policy change, or lack thereof, because framing cannot replace a cognitively motivated analysis of political action, as it creates additional cognitive barriers.

Yet, this hybrid approach works well until decision-makers face trade-offs when an additional reference point surfaces because either domestic politics or another international event pulls decision-makers toward conflicting preference orderings in the two dimensions. Owing to limited material or political resources, such cases are likely to be common. This accentuates and extends Levy's claim about the complexities of introducing domestic politics into the analysis of international politics via prospect theory.<sup>140</sup> The multiple dimensions of foreign policy-making can result in similarly complex analytical situations. Furthermore, domestic insecurities do not necessarily encourage risk-taking, especially if the reference point is in the future. The Bush Administration's trade-off between Iraq and Afghanistan suggests that prospect theory analysis may be complex enough even without thinking of domestic politics. Opening prospect theory up to the possibility of multiple reference points is an exciting theoretical consideration, but may prove analytically too complex.

The way in which the original framing of the situation constrains behaviour may not necessarily be in harmony with prospect theory: the American case in this article suggests that, under certain conditions, gains frames are as likely to result in a strong insistence on continuing existing policies as loss frames. Gains frames appear to be far more problematic than loss frames. As has been illustrated, the loss frame in Britain was accompanied with a reference point that allowed British decision-makers to monitor progress carefully. Potential gains, which are less important to people than avoiding losses, are much less helpful in monitoring success, because they are less likely to force or help decision-makers to clearly define their reference points. Coming up with a more precise future reference point later is only a marginal improvement because, as long as the reference point is not endangered, such a gains frame is unhelpful for monitoring progress and generates biases toward checking for gains. In other words, a gains frame tends to invite inaction until catastrophe is imminent. This is a problematic development, inasmuch as the panic and time pressure that may follow are hardly ideal conditions to re-examine beliefs or update policy, particularly in foreign and security policy.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See for example; Peceny and Bosin, "Winning with Warlords in Afghanistan"; Zakheim, *A Vulcan's Tale*.

<sup>2</sup> Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, 104.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, xxiii; Gentile, *Wrong Turn*, 12-36, Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*; Porch, *Counterinsurgency*.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Avant, *Political Institutions*; Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*; Dobbins et al., *After the War*; Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerrilla*.

<sup>5</sup> Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, 11; Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerrilla*, 110, 265; Moyer, *A Question of Command*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, 28; Egnell, "Winning 'Hearts and Minds?'" ; Cf. Hack, "Extracting Counterinsurgency Lessons."

<sup>7</sup> See for example, Mackinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago*, 49; Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, 57.

<sup>8</sup> Accusing the Chinese population for trouble in Malaya would have complicated relations with China. Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs*, 126; Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, 78.

<sup>9</sup> Gentile, *Wrong Turn*, 37-9.

<sup>10</sup> Gentile, *Wrong Turn*, 38; cf. Avant, *Political Institutions*, 102; Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, 253.

<sup>11</sup> Gentile, *Wrong Turn*, 51. See Ucko, "Critics gone wild" for a critical assessment of Gentile and Porch's books.

<sup>12</sup> Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerrilla*.

<sup>13</sup> Galula, *Counter-insurgency warfare*; Mackinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago*; Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, 15-16.

<sup>14</sup> For the same reasons, counterterrorism is also incompatible with nation-building. See Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerrilla*; Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos*; Mackinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago*; Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 80, 190.

<sup>15</sup> For the requirements of a counterinsurgency strategy, see Sarkesian, *Unconventional Conflicts*, 15; Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerrilla*, 110, 265; Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*.

- <sup>16</sup> See for example, Egnell, “Winning ‘Hearts and Minds?’”; Gentile, *Wrong Turn*; Porch, *Counterinsurgency*; Hack, “Everyone lived in fear”; Gompert, *Heads We Win*; Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*; Dixon, *The British Approach*; Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with A Knife*; Sarkesian, *Unconventional conflicts*.
- <sup>17</sup> Gentile, *Wrong Turn*; Porch, *Counterinsurgency*.
- <sup>18</sup> Gentile, *Wrong Turn*; Rovner, “Heroes of COIN”; Cf. Moyar, *A Question of Command*; Hack, “Extracting Counterinsurgency Lessons.”
- <sup>19</sup> Gentile, *Wrong Turn*; Porch, *Counterinsurgency*; Hack, “Everyone lived in fear”; Egnell, “Winning ‘Hearts and Minds?’”; Dixon, *The British Approach*.
- <sup>20</sup> Porch, *Counterinsurgency*.
- <sup>21</sup> Gentile, *Wrong Turn*.
- <sup>22</sup> Gentile, *Wrong Turn*, 7.
- <sup>23</sup> On Malaya see, Sarkesian, *Unconventional Conflicts*; Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*. Afghanistan fares slightly better in this respect. See Ryan, “‘Full spectrum dominance’”; Woodward, *Bush at War; Obama’s Wars*; Dobbins, *After the Taliban*; Dobbins et al., *After the War*; Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*; Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*; Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos*; Peceny and Bosin, “Winning with Warlords.”
- <sup>24</sup> Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, 35, 46;
- <sup>25</sup> Payne, “Social Psychology,” 80-1. See for example, Sarkesian, *Unconventional Conflicts*; Avant, *Political Institutions*; Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*; Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*; Pye, *Guerilla Communism in Malaya*; Mahendrarajah, “Conceptual Failure.”
- <sup>26</sup> Payne, *Social Psychology*; Gompert, *Heads We Win*.
- <sup>27</sup> Duncanson and Cornish, “A Feminist Approach.”
- <sup>28</sup> Kahneman and Tversky, “Prospect Theory.”
- <sup>29</sup> See for example. Kahneman and Tversky, “Choices, Values and Frames”; Welch, *Painful Choices*, 411-412; Levy, “Prospect Theory and International Relations,” 304; McDermott, *Risk-taking in International Politics*, 30.
- <sup>30</sup> See for example, Levy, “Prospect Theory and International Relations; Bueno de Mesquita and McDermott, “Crossing No Man’s Land”; Masters, “Support and Non-Support,” 704-708; McDermott, “Prospect Theory in Political Science,” 404-310.
- <sup>31</sup> Farnham, “Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis”; Tversky and Kahneman, “Rational Choice,” S257; McDermott, *Risk-taking in International Politics*.
- <sup>32</sup> McDermott, *Risk-taking in International Politics*.
- <sup>33</sup> Masters, “Support and Non-Support,” 707.
- <sup>34</sup> McDermott, *Risk-taking in International Politics*, 77-105; Levy, “Prospect Theory and International Relations,” 286-287.
- <sup>35</sup> See for example, Farnham, “Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis”; McDermott, *Risk-taking in International Politics*, 77-105.
- <sup>36</sup> Welch, *Painful Choices*.
- <sup>37</sup> McDermott, *Risk-taking in International Politics*; Masters, “Support and Non-Support.”
- <sup>38</sup> McDermott, *Risk-taking in International Politics*, 27-9, 41-2, 174.
- <sup>39</sup> Khong, *Analogies at War*, 24-29, 35-37; Welch, *Painful Choices*, 36-39.
- <sup>40</sup> Khong, *Analogies at War*, 39; Welch, *Painful Choices*, 37, 45.
- <sup>41</sup> Voss, “On the Representation of Problems,” 20-21.
- <sup>42</sup> Goldstein and Keohane, “Ideas and Foreign Policy,” 8-11.
- <sup>43</sup> Welch, *Painful Choices*, 36-39.
- <sup>44</sup> See for example, Hofmann and Asmundson. “Acceptance and mindfulness-based therapy.”
- <sup>45</sup> Voss, “On the Representation of Problems,” 21.
- <sup>46</sup> See for example, Goldmann, *Change and Stability in Foreign Policy*.
- <sup>47</sup> For a discussion of the type of change, see Hermann, “Changing Course,” 5; Rosati, Hagan, and Sampson, “The Study of Change in Foreign Policy,” 9.
- <sup>48</sup> Craddock, *Know Your Enemy*, 7-49.
- <sup>49</sup> See for example, UK PRO CAB 21/2883. “Chiefs of Staff Committee.”
- <sup>50</sup> Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, 25.
- <sup>51</sup> UK PRO CO 537/4246, “Communist Influence in Malaya.”
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid.; UK PRO CO 537/3755, “JBW to Seel”; UK PRO CO 537/4246, “Defence Co-ordination Committee”; UK PRO CO 537/4246, “F. Gimson to Boudillon”; Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, 27-28.
- <sup>53</sup> UK PRO CAB 129/28, “C.P. (48) 171 “The Situation in Malaya”; Jeffreys, *The Attlee Governments*, 25-28, 33-34; Sarkesian, *Unconventional Conflicts*, 28-30

- <sup>54</sup> Jackson, “The Weight of Ideas in Decolonization,” 115; UK PRO PREM 8/459, “Policy in regard to Malaya.”
- <sup>55</sup> UK PRO CAB 128/13, “50(48): Item 3, July 13.”
- <sup>56</sup> UK PRO PREM 8/459, “Policy in regard to Malaya.”
- <sup>57</sup> UK PRO CAB 21/2626, “Situation in Malaya.”
- <sup>58</sup> UK PRO CO 537/4246, “G.F. Seel to Gimson”; UK PRO FO 1110/8, “Communist influence in Malaya”; Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, 77-78.
- <sup>59</sup> Mackinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago*, 12.
- <sup>60</sup> UK PRO CAB 21/2626, “Situation in Malaya.”
- <sup>61</sup> UK PRO CO 537/4246, “G.F. Seel to Gimson”; UK PRO FO 1110/8, “Communist influence in Malaya.”
- <sup>62</sup> UK PRO PREM 6/1406, part 1, “Hansard extract, July 23, 1948”; Jeffreys, *The Attlee Governments*, 37.
- <sup>63</sup> UK CO 537/4246, “JBW to Mr. Seel.”
- <sup>64</sup> Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, 78; Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 28-29
- <sup>65</sup> UK PRO CO 537/4762, “H.D. to Mr Backburne”; Sarkesian, *Unconventional Conflicts*, 136; Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 15; Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, 35, 37, 77.
- <sup>66</sup> UK PRO CAB 129/28, “C.P. (48) 171: The Situation in Malaya”; UK PRO PREM 8/1406, part 1, “Note by the War Office”; Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, 37; Mackinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago*, 12.
- <sup>67</sup> Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, 31. Short-termism was also forced on Britain by troop shortages. See UK PRO CAB 129/28, “C.P. (48) 171: The Situation in Malaya.”
- <sup>68</sup> UK PRO CO 537/4246, “Defence Co-Ordination Committee.”
- <sup>69</sup> Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, 207; Bush, *Decision Points*, 81.
- <sup>70</sup> Dobbins et al., *After the War*, 93; Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerrilla*, 274.
- <sup>71</sup> Woodward, *Bush at War*, 115, 192; Barno, “Fighting ‘The Other War’,” 35; Feith, *War and Decision*, 121; Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 90; Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos*, 196; Bush, *Decision Points*, 205, 207; Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 85; Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 377.
- <sup>72</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 377.
- <sup>73</sup> Woodward, *Bush at War*, 102; Dobbins et al., *After the War*, 85; Zakheim, *A Vulcan’s Tale*, 8-9.
- <sup>74</sup> Dobbins, *After the Taliban*, 135.
- <sup>75</sup> Woodward, *Bush at War*, 192-3, 231, 236, 242; Barno, “Fighting ‘The Other War’,” 34; Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 724.
- <sup>76</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 377.
- <sup>77</sup> Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos*, 173; Feith, *War and Decision*, 149; US State Department “Powell to Rumsfeld.” President Bush claimed he changed his mind. See Bush, *Decision Points*, 205; Feith, *War and Decision*, 148-149. However Rumsfeld’s account is more in harmony with developments.
- <sup>78</sup> Zakheim, *A Vulcan’s Tale*, 7.
- <sup>79</sup> Dobbins et al., *After the War*, 92; Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos*, 171-219; Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerrilla*, 114; Zakheim, *A Vulcan’s Tale*, 165, 266.
- <sup>80</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 681.
- <sup>81</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 377, 408-409. On early optimism see for example, US DOD, “Memorandum for the President”; Neumann, *The Other War*, 52; Bush, *Decision Points*, 207.
- <sup>82</sup> US DOD, “Afghan National Police”; US DOD, “Marin Strmecki and Afghanistan Briefing”; Barno, “Fighting ‘The Other War’”; Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos*, 189, 252.
- <sup>83</sup> Dobbins et al., *After the War*, 92; Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos*, 171-219; Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerrilla*, 114; Zakheim, *A Vulcan’s Tale*, 165, 266.
- <sup>84</sup> Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos*, 190-193, 353; Neumann, *The Other War*, 38-50; Barno, “Fighting ‘The Other War’.”
- <sup>85</sup> Gates, *Duty*, 355.
- <sup>86</sup> Woodward, *Bush at War*, 115, 192; Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 90; Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos*, 196.
- <sup>87</sup> UK PRO PREM 8/1406, part 1, “Hansard extract, September 23, 1950.”
- <sup>88</sup> UK PRO PREM 8/1406, part 1, “CM (49) 18<sup>th</sup> Conclusions, March 8.”
- <sup>89</sup> UK PRO CAB 21/2626, “Top Secret Cypher Telegram.”
- <sup>90</sup> UK PRO PREM /1406, part 1, “The Secretary of War to the Prime Minister”; Avant, *Political Institutions*, 120.
- <sup>91</sup> UK PRO PREM 8/1126, “Emanuel Shinwell to the Prime Minister.”
- <sup>92</sup> Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 72.
- <sup>93</sup> UK PRO PREM 8/1126, “Cabinet: Malaya Committee.”
- <sup>94</sup> Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, 110; Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 73; cf. Gentile, *Wrong Turn*, 49.
- <sup>95</sup> Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 88; Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs*, 162-168.
- <sup>96</sup> Gentile, *Wrong Turn*, 38.

- <sup>97</sup> US DOD, “Lists.”; Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 719-22.
- <sup>98</sup> Neumann, *The Other War*, 160.
- <sup>99</sup> See for example, Ryan, ““Full spectrum dominance”” for a similar interpretation.
- <sup>100</sup> US DOD, “Afghanistan. Donald Rumsfeld to Doug Feith and Gen. Myers.”
- <sup>101</sup> US DOD, “US Strategy in Afghanistan.”
- <sup>102</sup> US DOD, “Lists.”
- <sup>103</sup> US DOD, “Principles for Afghanistan”; Bush, *Decision Points*, 197.
- <sup>104</sup> UK PRO CO 537/4246, “Lloyd to Rees-Williams.”
- <sup>105</sup> Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, 104; US DOD, “Principles for Afghanistan”; Bush, *Decision Points*, 197; The idea of a democratic Afghanistan emerged earlier, but contradictory accounts in this regard corroborate the argument that the government had no clearly defined aims. Compare Bush, *Decision Points*, 197 with Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 398, 682; Zakheim, *A Vulcan’s Tale*, 81.
- <sup>106</sup> US DOD, “Steve Cambone to Donald Rumsfeld”; US DOD, “Afghanistan Funding”; US DOD, “Afghanistan, Rumsfeld to Gen. Dick Myers.” Feith, *War and Decision*, 512.
- <sup>107</sup> US DOD, “Global War on Terrorism.”; Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 344.
- <sup>108</sup> US DOD, “Memorandum, Rumsfeld”; US DOD, “Continuing U.S. Government Efforts”; Barno, “Fighting ‘The Other War’,” 42.
- <sup>109</sup> US DOD. “Talk to Doug Feith”; Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 344.
- <sup>110</sup> Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 344-5; US White House, ““Accelerating Success in Afghanistan’ in 2004.”
- <sup>111</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 209-210, Gates, *Duty*, 198.
- <sup>112</sup> Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos*, 191.
- <sup>113</sup> US DOD, “Afghan National Police.”
- <sup>114</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 687-690; Neumann, *The Other War*, 109, 127.
- <sup>115</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 687-690.
- <sup>116</sup> Neumann, *The Other War*, 53, 84.
- <sup>117</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 211.
- <sup>118</sup> Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 446; Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 687-689.
- <sup>119</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*; Rice, *No Higher Honor*.
- <sup>120</sup> UK PRO CAB 129/28, “C.P. (48) 171: The Situation in Malaya.”
- <sup>121</sup> Neumann, *The Other War*, 127; Bush, *Decision Points*, 212; Cheney, *In My Time*, 271; Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 687-690.
- <sup>122</sup> US DOD, “Afghanistan. Donald Rumsfeld to President George W. Bush”; US DOD, “Afghanistan. Donald Rumsfeld to Doug Feith and Gen. Myers”; Neumann, *The Other War*, 51.
- <sup>123</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 687-9.
- <sup>124</sup> Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 636.
- <sup>125</sup> Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, 43-4; Bush, *Decision Points*, 218; Gates, *Duty*, 221.
- <sup>126</sup> Obama, “Remarks at the Veterans Of Foreign Wars Convention.”
- <sup>127</sup> Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*. See also Obama, “Remarks on the Way Forward”.
- <sup>128</sup> Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, 240; Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, 104; Gates, *Duty*, 336-337; Obama, “Remarks on A New Strategy”; Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 130, 132.
- <sup>129</sup> Gates, *Duty*, 335-386, 468-523; Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 130.
- <sup>130</sup> Gates, *Duty*, 556.
- <sup>131</sup> Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 132; Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, 186-90.
- <sup>132</sup> Gates, *Duty*, 355-360, 366; Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*; Obama, “Remarks on the Way Forward.”
- <sup>133</sup> Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, 82-84, 99, 175-179; Gates, *Duty*, 243, 355, 364; Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 138.
- <sup>134</sup> Gates, *Duty*, 335-386; Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 132, 138.
- <sup>135</sup> Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*; Gates, *Duty*, 336.
- <sup>136</sup> Gates, *Duty*, 557; Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, 161, 309.
- <sup>137</sup> Gentile, *Wrong Turn*, 37-9.
- <sup>138</sup> See Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, 105 for a similar argument with regard to military strategy.
- <sup>139</sup> Gates, *Duty*, 556.
- <sup>140</sup> McDermott, *Risk-taking in International Politics*, 181; Levy, “Prospect Theory and International Relations,” 287.

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