

Strategic Myths in Afghanistan and Pakistan

by John Sides on June 27, 2011 · [0 comments](#)

in [Foreign Policy](#), [War](#)

[Joshua Rovner and Austin Long](#):

Coalition strategy is based on the assumptions that the only way to deny al Qaeda safe haven is by building a strong central Afghan state and that Pakistan's nuclear complex will become increasingly vulnerable to militant attacks if the Taliban succeeds in Afghanistan.

Both assumptions are wrong. The United States does not need to build a state in Afghanistan because the conditions that allowed al Qaeda safe haven in the 1990s have permanently changed. Moreover, the steps needed to help Pakistan secure its nuclear arsenal have nothing to do with the war in Afghanistan. Policymakers should scale back their ambitions in Afghanistan. If they do so, they could cut troop levels by 80–90 percent while defending core U.S. interests and dramatically reducing the costs to America in both blood and treasure.

Compare [Fotini Christia](#):

In Obama's speech, the main justification for leaving Afghanistan was that al Qaeda is crippled and compromised—and this is sufficient from the U.S. perspective. But for Afghans, defeating al Qaeda has never been as urgent as ending the Taliban insurgency, which, in its tenth year, needs a political solution, not just a military one. Obama acknowledged as much, saying, "As we strengthen the Afghan government and Security Forces, America will join initiatives that reconcile the Afghan people, including the Taliban." But it is unclear how such a settlement could come about under the truncated timetable of U.S. withdrawal.

[Hat tip to [Paul Staniland](#)]