

The reality of Obama's 2008 campaign promises: a case study of the Afghan poppy trade

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BA thesis

July 3rd, 2020

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Abstract

The biggest pillar of President Barack Obama's presidential campaign in 2008 was change. One specific aspect of that change concerned the situation of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan. Obama was ready to win the war and bring American soldiers home. However, 19 years after the first invasion, the U.S. is still present in Afghanistan. That is why this thesis explores the changes that Obama wanted to bring in American policy in Afghanistan and how these changes turned out: 'In what ways has Obama kept his 2008 campaign promises to do things differently regarding American policy in Afghanistan in comparison to President George W. Bush?' Using content analysis of speeches, academic literature, official reports, and the 'Afghanistan Papers', it looks closely at promises that Obama made during his campaign and compares these to his policies and results once he became president. The thesis concludes that Obama did change American policies in Afghanistan but was not able to achieve some of his goals due to corruption and inept understanding of the Afghan society. The administration did not account for the differences between Afghan and U.S. society and tried to project the American approach on Afghanistan unsuccessfully.

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List of abbreviations

C.I.A.	Central Intelligence Agency
D.E.A.	Drug Enforcement Agency
D.O.D.	Department of Defense
H.F.Z.	Helmand Food Zone
I.S.I.S.	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
S.I.G.A.R.	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
U.K.	United Kingdom
U.N.	United Nations
U.N.O.D.C.	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
U.S.	United States
U.S.G.	United States Government

Introduction

The entire world was in shock after the events of September 11, 2001. The United States (U.S.) had not experienced an attack of this magnitude on its soil since the attacks on Pearl Harbor. With the collapse of the World Trade Center, the George W. Bush administration found its purpose: to fight those who were responsible for this injustice (Herring, 2010). This was the beginning of the War on Terror. The U.S. invaded Afghanistan to destroy Al Qaeda and the Taliban who provided safe havens for them. In 2020, 19 years later, the U.S. is still present in Afghanistan. The war has cost many American and international lives, in addition to billions of dollars. Bush was criticized for his military policy in the Middle East and when Barack Obama was running for president, he vowed to do things differently. His entire campaign was based on the need for change, and this included the situation in Afghanistan. However, since the U.S. is still present in Afghanistan, Obama was not able to achieve all of his promises of change concerning Afghanistan. This thesis takes a close look at Obama's campaign promises about Afghanistan and the effect of his policies after he became president in 2008. It answers the following research question: 'In what ways has Obama kept his 2008 campaign promises to do things differently regarding policy in Afghanistan in comparison to Bush?' The thesis argues that Obama was genuinely planning on changing the way things were done in Afghanistan as he promised in his campaign speeches but that it turned out to be more complicated than he thought.

Even though the events in Afghanistan are recent and still ongoing, the academic world has expressed several opinions about the situation in Afghanistan and the Bush and Obama administrations' responses. Lasher and Rinehart (2016) argue that Obama's foreign policy consisted mostly of what they call 'shadowboxing': fighting an invisible enemy. By doing this he is not actively implementing change in policy necessarily, but mostly responding to actions as they come. Crane (2015) points to a shift in focus from Iraq to Afghanistan when the new administration started. It was not really a change of politics, but more of priorities. Obama thought he was fighting 'the good fight' in Afghanistan while Bush was more focused on Iraq and the 'global war on terror'. This is also seen in Keane's (2016) article, in which he explains how the Bush administration and especially the military only saw Afghanistan as the first step in the War on Terror. They were only interested in capturing or killing the people responsible for 9/11, not in finding an appropriate way to do it so that the U.S. military could leave Afghanistan in reasonably good hands when they left again. By the time it became Obama's responsibility it

was clear that the issue in Afghanistan needed more attention than what Bush had given it since he invaded Iraq. Several suggestions have been done to explain the lengthy U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Suhrke (2012) argues that the international peacekeeping mission itself is the reason for the current situation, especially because all the money that it brought fueled corruption. Chandrasekaran (2013) says that Obama took a contradictory approach with the Afghanistan surge while at the same time announcing the troop reduction, setting himself up for failure. This thesis however, argues that Obama failed in some of his foreign policy promises in Afghanistan due to reasons that lied beyond motivation and intention. It examines the obstacles that Obama encountered in Afghanistan

The release of the so-called 'Afghanistan Papers' in December 2019 gives a new and unique perspective on the policies and events in Afghanistan. The Papers consist of interviews conducted by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) in their Lessons Learned program. It provides first-hand information from people that in some shape of form were involved in the war in Afghanistan, on either the U.S., Afghan, or other international actors' side. The Afghanistan Papers are a valuable primary source that should be considered when discussing U.S. involvement in Afghanistan. However, with many primary sources there are pro's and con's. The interviews for the program were conducted mostly around 2015, sometimes a decade after the events discussed in the interviews. This can lead to altered recollections of events and actors. Nevertheless, the recollection of first-hand experiences remains valuable to the discussion. That is why the interviews will be used throughout the thesis.

This thesis is divided into three sub-questions, with the last one being answered with the help of a case study:

- What exactly did Obama promise to do in Afghanistan?
- What became of Obama's promises in reality?
- What were the reasons for Obama's failure to keep all of his campaign promises?

The thesis starts by identifying the promises that Obama made about Afghanistan during his presidential campaign in 2008. The results have combined into an overview of promises in the first chapter. Chapter two summarizes what Obama actually accomplished on these topics, based on an analysis of newspaper articles, academic literature, and the Afghanistan Papers. Chapter three consists of a case study of the poppy trade to take a close look at the actors involved and potential reasons for either success or failure. This case was selected because it is an adequate

representation of the problems that the U.S. faced in Afghanistan as it was a consistent problem for most of the war in Afghanistan. An analysis of the poppy trade explains why Obama was not able to keep some of his promises. The case study offers an insight into the effectiveness of U.S. policy in Afghanistan which can be broadened to include other aspects of Obama's failed promises that are discussed in this thesis.

1. Bush' policy and Obama's promises

This chapter provides an overview of the promises that Obama made during his 2008 presidential campaign. The first subchapter starts by looking at Bush's foreign policy regarding Afghanistan and Iraq after his initial response to 9/11. This is done to show the contrast with the changes that Obama calls for in his campaign, which is described in the following subchapter. The third subchapter is important in answering the research question and answers the following sub question: What exactly did Obama promise to do in Afghanistan? Since the main research question examines whether Obama kept his campaign promises or not, those promises need to be articulated clearly. First, Obama's public addresses during his campaign are scanned for mentions of Afghanistan. The most relevant speeches and debates undergo a content analysis in which Obama's statements are categorized. This makes sure that the thesis provides a full picture of Obama's stands regarding Afghanistan.

1.1 Bush's policy

Bush has been heavily criticized for his actions after 9/11, especially concerning the invasion of Iraq (Herring, 2010). It has been said that he has constructed a narrative around the attacks and thereby essentially created the War on Terror, which was not the only response possible (Middup, 2015). Bush introduced the concept of preemptive striking to protect the United States against attacks without having to wait to be attacked. However, it also happens to fit the neoconservative agenda of the Bush administration: the need to spread democracy around the world (Herring, 2010; Middup, 2015). After the end of the Cold War, the U.S. saw its foreign policy without a clear purpose, which was found after 9/11 (Herring, 2010). The objective of spreading democracy was enacted by invading countries but lacked the logical response of effective nation-building which led to a war that has been going on for almost two decades now. As soon as the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was toppled, Bush shifted the focus to Saddam Hussein in Iraq, leaving Afghanistan mostly to the United Nations (U.N.). The Bush administration showed a reluctance to be involved in Afghanistan any further than to seek 'justice', this later evolved into trying to provide security to Afghanistan (Chesterman, 2004). Suhrke argues that the lack of nation-building from the beginning is one of the main reasons that the U.S. was involved in Afghanistan for so long (2012). When Bush left office after 2008, the

U.S. was fighting a war on two fronts, in both Afghanistan and Iraq, spreading the resources and manpower.

1.2 Obama's 2008 presidential campaign

The biggest pillar of Barack Obama's presidential campaign in 2008 was change. When he announced to run for office on August 28, 2007, he made clear why he was running: "I know I haven't spent a lot of time learning the ways of Washington. But I've been there long enough to know that the ways of Washington must change" (Obama, 2007). That is why he ran his campaign under the slogan 'Change we can believe in', in combination with the chant 'Yes We Can'. Throughout his speeches in the primaries and presidential election he mentioned several subjects that needed to change in order to move forward: poverty, health care, education, and ongoing wars. Obama believed he could improve American society through these changes. When he accepted the democratic nomination in 2008, he asked the people of the U.S. to vote for change: "America, we are better than these last eight years. We are a better country than this" (Obama, 2008a). With this statement, he made a clear reference to President Bush's leadership, since Bush was responsible for the last eight years. Being a Democrat, Obama had different ideals than the Republican Bush. On top of that Obama critiqued Bush's style of leading the country. At one point he even referred to Bush's presidency as "tough talk and bad strategy" (Obama, 2008a). Obama faced Senator John McCain in the presidential race, a Republican who voted the same as Bush on important issues in the Senate ninety percent of the time, including issues in the Middle East (Obama, 2008c; 2008e). By making the comparison between McCain and Bush, Obama urged the American people that McCain was not the change that America needed. Instead, they should vote for someone that has been advocating for change during his time as senator.

1.3 Promises about Afghanistan

Obama made sure to clarify from the beginning that U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq was one of the issues that he wanted to change by explicitly stating it in the speech in which he announced his candidacy for President (Obama, 2007). In this speech he already set out two of his promises, namely taking down the terrorists that were responsible for 9/11 and leaving Iraq. Over the course of his presidential campaign, Obama made several promises regarding policy in Afghanistan which he consistently repeated in public addresses that fitted the subject.

His most elaborate addresses of the Afghanistan issue were during his visit at the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Convention in August of 2008, and the first presidential debate in September of 2008, in which the candidates talked about foreign policy and national security. The promises discussed in this subchapter are derived from these two instances in combination with speeches where he also mentions the issue less elaborately. Three different categories are made to distinguish between the nature of the promises, namely:

- General policy changes in the Department of Defense (D.O.D.)
- Specific changes in approach on the ground in Afghanistan
- Goals that Obama intended to achieve during his presidency

The structure of this subchapter reflects those categories; the first paragraph discusses general policy changes, the second paragraph discusses the means, and the third paragraph discusses the goals Obama set.

Obama has been very adamant about his opinion that the United States should not have gotten involved in Iraq because that was not where the terrorist were and the fight in Afghanistan was not over (Obama, 2008d). A given that he has often used against his opponent McCain, a proponent of the Iraq War. An example of this is the first presidential debate, with the pre-arranged subjects of foreign policy and national security (Obama, 2008e). Obama set out three arguments that do not necessarily affect Afghanistan directly but certainly have an influence on its future treatment, and as he states: “we cannot separate Afghanistan from Iraq” (Obama, 2008e). Firstly, he critiqued the amount of money the U.S. is spending in the Middle East, especially in Iraq. The U.S. has spent over \$600 billion in Iraq and is still adding \$10 billion per month to that number. He wanted to cut the Defense budget and use the money to “invest in America” instead (Obama, 2008d). Secondly, Obama stated that the focus needs to shift from Iraq back to Afghanistan because that is where the real enemy is, where the War on Terror began: “every intelligence agency will acknowledge that Al Qaida is the greatest threat against the United States and that Secretary of Defense Gates acknowledged the central front -- that the place where we have to deal with these folks is going to be in Afghanistan and in Pakistan” (Obama, 2008e). Iraq needed to take more responsibility in self-government so that the U.S. could focus on fighting terrorism in Afghanistan (Obama, 2008c, 2008f). Thirdly, Obama wanted to reclaim legitimacy in Pakistan by changing U.S. perspective from a Musharraf policy to a Pakistan policy. Instead of supporting an illegitimate leader, the U.S. should support a government that

treats the Pakistani people well and has legitimate power. This should help to gain Pakistani support in destroying Al Qaeda safe havens in Pakistan to make the hunt for Al Qaeda leadership in Afghanistan easier.

This in turn, also leads to one of the specific changes that Obama wanted to make in Afghanistan. Since the U.S. was fighting a war in Iraq, the troops in Afghanistan did not have the support and resources that they needed. During the second presidential debate in 2008, Obama stated that American bases were experiencing an increase of violence directed at them from Taliban forces (Obama, 2008f). In response to that, Obama would send “two to three additional brigades” (Obama, 2008e) to Afghanistan if he were to become president. A brigade consists of 1500 to 3200 soldiers which means that Obama planned to send a range from 3000 up to 9600 troops to Afghanistan to fight Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Additional troops and resources were not the only solution that Obama had in mind. He also demanded a more active cooperation with the Afghan government and President Karzai to ensure “that they are actually working for their people” (Obama, 2008e). He was willing to help Afghanistan with \$1 billion in non-military assistance as long as the government took a stand against corruption and the narcotics trade (Obama, 2008d). This trade is another aspect that Obama wanted to focus on (Obama, 2008e). Local warlords and Taliban funded many of their weapons and military actions with the profit made from growing and selling opium (Engle, 2020). In order to limit the access that the Taliban and Al Qaeda have to weapons and other necessities, the U.S. needed to limit the poppy trade and cut funding to terrorist groups.

The previous paragraph describes means that Obama planned to use to accomplish the following goals in Afghanistan. He set out three main objectives in his public appearances. Firstly, Obama wanted to capture and kill those responsible for 9/11, which consists of capturing and killing Osama bin Laden and his top lieutenants (Obama, 2008a, 2008d, 2008e). Secondly, he wanted to end the fight with Al Qaeda and the Taliban so that American soldiers can come home (Obama, 2008a, 2008d, 2008b, 2008e). The U.S. needed to win this war on terror to prevent future efforts and to leave the Afghan people with a safe country. Thirdly, to ensure this would happen, Obama wanted a democracy, a government that represents the needs of the Afghan people (Obama, 2008f). Current President Karzai could be a part of that government if he was able to gain enough support from his citizens.

In short, Obama made statements of three different categories regarding policy in Afghanistan: general Defense changes, means, and goals. He wanted to cut spending by the Defense department in the Middle East, refocus to Afghanistan instead of Iraq in the War on Terror, and force Pakistan to be stricter in their attitude towards Al Qaeda and the Taliban. He stated three clear goals that he wanted to reach in his presidency: capture and kill Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants, end the war on terror in Afghanistan, and leave Afghanistan while it has a democratic government. Obama intended to do this by increasing the number of troops in Afghanistan, increasing the cooperation with the Afghan government, and tackling the immense drug production and trade in Afghanistan. The next chapter will focus on what actually became of Obama's promises.

2. The reality of Obama's policies

The previous chapter discussed which promises about Afghanistan Obama made during his presidential campaign in 2008. This chapter explores how Obama's promises turned out in reality by looking at all of the aspects discussed in Chapter two. It tries to answer the following sub-question: What became of Obama's promises in reality? This is necessary to be able to compare the results to his promises, so that a conclusion can be drawn about whether Obama kept his promises or not. The promises are grouped together based on their content since some promises overlap. The chapter starts off by discussing the aspects in which Obama was able to succeed, followed by a discussion of the aspects in which Obama failed.

2.1 Shift the focus to Afghanistan

One of the most repeated promises that Obama made was that he would end the war in Iraq and bring back the focus to Afghanistan. This promise consists of two specific aspects, the first being the reduced military presence in Iraq, the second being the increase of the effort in Afghanistan. The third promise that is discussed in this subchapter is the promise to reduce spending by the D.O.D. in the Middle East. The war spending in both Iraq and Afghanistan also reflects the shift in focus from Iraq to Afghanistan since the money follows this shift.

American presence in Iraq consisted of 150,000 soldiers when the U.S. first invaded the country. At its highest point in September 2007, 168,000 U.S. soldiers were stationed in Iraq (O'Hanlon & Livingston, 2011). In January of 2009, Obama's first year as president, 142,000 soldiers were present in Iraq, this number did not increase anymore during his presidency (O'Hanlon & Livingston, 2011). Obama prepared for the shift from combat mission to training mission in the first two years of his presidency. Then, he ended the U.S. combat mission in Iraq in August, 2010. Since then, while still training Iraqi security forces, American troops started returning to the U.S. until the combatant military presence in Iraq was zero in December, 2011 (Congressional Research Service, 2014; O'Hanlon & Livingston, 2011). These soldiers were then available to use in other areas, for example Afghanistan, which leads to the next promise Obama made in his campaign. He promised to send the troops in Afghanistan more resources and extra support so that they could do a better job.

Bush started the 'Afghanistan surge' in 2008 before leaving office by increasing troops in Afghanistan from 40,000 to 45,000 (Congressional Research Service, 2014). Obama set forth

this trend according to his promises and sent 20,000 troops in 2009, and an additional 30,000 troops in 2010 (Congressional Research Service, 2014; Livingston & O’Hanlon, 2012). In 2010 and 2011, boots on the ground reached its highest level with 100,000 soldiers within the borders of Afghanistan. Obama announced in 2011 that he wanted to hand initiative to Afghan forces so the U.S. forces could change from a combat role to a training and supporting role, this should have helped in decreasing military presence. During the period of increased boots on the ground, funding was also increased (Congressional Research Service, 2014). Some of this money was directly related to the increase of troops, since they receive deployment funds.

Obama, however, promised in his campaign to reduce the war costs overseas so that the money could be used in the U.S.. Especially the spending in Iraq should decrease significantly because of the shift from Iraq to Afghanistan as discussed above. The D.O.D. states that war costs are: “incremental costs that would not have been incurred had the contingency operation not been supported (Congressional Research Service, 2014).” This means that military costs that are also made during peace time, such as base pay, are not included in the war costs.

Table 1 shows the war cost in \$ billions of Afghanistan and Iraq from the beginning of the war on terror, including a total war cost for both wars. When looking at 2009, the first year of Obama’s presidency, the table shows spending of \$56 billion in Afghanistan and \$93.1 billion in Iraq which gives a total of \$149.1 billion for that year. While spending in Afghanistan increased before it decreased in accordance with the extra men and resources, the spending in Iraq steadily decreased during Obama’s presidency. The total of the two wars also decreased under the Obama administration after a slight increase in 2010. Since the numbers are collected in 2014, the amount for 2015 is an estimate but the 2019 version of the document shows a similar trend in 2015 and 2016, the last years of Obama’s presidency (Congressional Research Service, 2019). While the costs in Afghanistan

Table 1: War cost in \$ billions
(Congressional Research Service, 2014)

	Afghan	Iraqi	Total:
2001/02	22.8	0.0	22.8
2003	17.4	51.0	68.4
2004	15.4	76.7	92.1
2005	20.7	79.1	99.8
2006	18.7	96.0	114.7
2007	31.3	130.8	162.1
2008	39.0	143.9	182.9
2009	56.0	93.1	149.1
2010	94.1	64.8	158.9
2011	106.8	46.5	153.3
2012	100.6	20.3	120.9
2013	85.6	7.7	93.3
2014	77.4	4.8	82.2
2015*	58.1	5.0	63.1

continued to decrease until under \$50 billion, the spending in Iraq increased slightly in 2015 and 2016 after responses to increased activity from the terrorist group Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (I.S.I.S.) (Congressional Research Service, 2019). The overall costs remained very low however, compared to the start of Obama's presidency. This means that Obama was able to keep his promise to reduce the spending in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While some sources showed different numbers for the war costs in Afghanistan and Iraq, the numbers showed the same decreasing trend (Livingston & O'Hanlon, 2012). The difference could be the definition of war costs or the addition of rounded numbers. Nonetheless, this means that the conclusion of this argument remains the same, even though the exact numbers might differ slightly.

2.2 Pakistan and Al Qaeda

Another promise that Obama made was to tighten the bond with Pakistan and make sure that they supported the hunt for Al Qaeda. In the beginning of Obama's presidency, both military and economic U.S. aid to Pakistan increased significantly for this purpose. The total aid under Bush in 2008 consisted of \$2 billion which increased under Obama to \$3 billion in 2009, and \$4.5 billion in 2010 (Livingston & O'Hanlon, 2012). However, counteractive to this increase in support, the amount of terrorist attacks, Pakistani military deaths, and U.S. drone strikes also increased (Baker et al., 2011; Livingston & O'Hanlon, 2012; Simon & Stevenson, 2009). While the Bush administration accounted for 36 drone strikes in Pakistan in 2008, Obama's administration noted 53 strikes in its first year, and 117 strikes in its second year (Livingston & O'Hanlon, 2012). Obama's goal was to regain legitimacy in Pakistan and gain their support in defeating Al Qaeda. However, the increase in U.S. drone strikes seemed to do the opposite as they made more victims than supporters (Livingston & O'Hanlon, 2012; Perlez, 2011). The increased U.S. foot print in both Afghanistan and Pakistan would create anti-Americanism and increase radicalization in Pakistan (Simon & Stevenson, 2009). Pakistan protested unilateral actions by especially the C.I.A., who increased the number of operatives in Pakistan without consulting them, and demanded to be more included in future actions by threatening the freedom of operation for the C.I.A. (Miller & DeYoung, 2011). A reduction in freedom of operation for the C.I.A. could have been critical in the search for Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden since the C.I.A. later stood at the beginning of a successful raid that killed Bin Laden in Pakistan (Ignatius,

2011). Had Pakistan forbidden the C.I.A. to operate on its soil, Bin Laden might have never been found and killed. This ties into the next promise that Obama made in his campaign, namely to capture and kill those responsible for 9/11.

From the moment Obama became president he increased the number of targeted killings to keep this promise (Simon & Stevenson, 2019). By the end of 2009, the drone strikes mentioned before had taken out four high level Al Qaeda members (Simon & Stevenson, 2009). Obama continued the hunt for Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan. On May 1, 2011, he announced to the world that U.S. Navy Seals and C.I.A. operatives had performed a raid on a compound where Osama Bin Laden was suspected to be hiding (Baker et al., 2011). During this raid, Osama Bin Laden and his son were killed in a gun fight after refusing to surrender. The compound was located in Abbottabad, which is a town an hour north of Islamabad, Pakistan's capital (Baker et al., 2011). Bin Laden's second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, was never captured or killed and took over the leadership of Al-Qaeda after Bin Laden's death (CNN Library, 2019).

Even though Obama was not able to create a better diplomatic relationship with Pakistan, he did succeed in keeping the relations good enough to reach the objective of killing Osama Bin Laden and some of his lieutenants.

2.3 Failed promises: Nation-building in Afghanistan

The promises discussed in this subchapter all reflect the U.S. attempt at nation-building in Afghanistan. The collaboration between the U.S. and the Afghan government was one promise, which in combination with the promise of tackling the drug-trade should have ensured the accomplishment of the next two promises, namely that the U.S. left Afghanistan as a safe democracy and the War on Terror was over.

Obama expected more support from Afghanistan's government and wanted President Karzai to take a stand against corruption and drug trade. In return, the U.S. supported Karzai to become reelected in the 2009 presidential elections (Browne & Carter, 2009). However, U.S. relations with president Karzai were complicated. After the U.S. invaded Afghanistan under the Bush administration in 2001, it forced Karzai to build his government according to an American centralized structure, which was never used in Afghanistan. The dynamics between different tribes and organizations in Afghanistan called for a more decentralized construction of government (Boucher, 2015). This created tensions between the U.S. and Karzai which only

worsened over the course of the war. Since the beginning of U.S. collaboration with Karzai, Karzai felt unheard by the U.S. government (Strmecki, 2015). Former ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker explained in his interview with SIGAR that Obama asked two things of him when he started his job in 2011: to improve the relationship with President Karzai, and to create a clear bilateral agreement with Afghanistan on many things, including security (Crocker, 2016). However, the U.S. apparently did not put effort into understanding the manner of operations in Afghanistan (Boucher, 2015). Just like Pakistan, Karzai felt left out in treaty and peace negotiations (Perlez, 2011). On top of that, Karzai failed to take a hard stance against corruption and the drug trade. He relied on friends and family to provide him with information and support him politically. In return, Karzai protected them from corruption charges (Creal, 2016). His brother, for example, stole government money without any consequences. The lack of trust between the U.S. and Karzai caused a lack of interest in counter narcotic efforts on Karzai's part which will be discussed in the next section (Zia, 2016). All in all, the U.S. did not succeed in creating a stronger partnership with Afghanistan's government and President Karzai, mainly because their interests were not always aligned and the U.S. did not put effort into keeping Karzai involved with negotiations.

The lack of partnership between the U.S. and President Karzai was significant in the attempt to tackle the drug-trade in Afghanistan, which Obama promised he would do. The U.S. did not play a significant role in counter narcotics efforts until end the of 2003. It became a priority in 2004, after which several strategies were explored (SIGAR, 2018). During the Bush administration, counternarcotic policy was largely based on poppy eradication, along with a ban on drugs, reform and awareness efforts, and providing economic and agricultural support (U.S. Senate caucus on international narcotics control, 2010; SIGAR, 2018). This changed in 2009 under Obama, who changed the focus to providing sustainable alternatives for farmers instead of eradication and to stopping high level drug lords (U.S. Senate caucus on international narcotics control, 2010). On top of that, the D.O.D. changed its policy so that the U.S. military could support the Drug Enforcement Administration (D.E.A.) on its missions to battle drug trade. These policies showed their effectiveness as poppy cultivation decreased in 2009-2011. However, the measurement of this success is misleading, which will be discussed in Chapter three. The U.S. counternarcotic strategy for 2010 and 2012 focused mainly on transferring the efforts from U.S. control to Afghan control, with the troop drawdown in sight (SIGAR, 2018). With the drawdown

in 2011, priorities shifted and less resources were dedicated to battle opium cultivation. This caused a resurgence of cultivation in the years that followed (SIGAR, 2018).

The partnership with President Karzai and the counternarcotic effort were meant to leave Afghanistan a safe democracy. This statement actually consists of three components: leaving, safety, and democracy. As of December 2019 around 12,000-13,000 U.S. military troops are still stationed in Afghanistan (SIGAR, 2020). This means that the U.S. has not yet succeeded in leaving Afghanistan until present date. Afghanistan is still experiencing great losses of civilians. Throughout Obama's first term, numbers on civilian casualties have not experienced a significant decrease, and they even saw an increase in his second term (SIGAR, 2020). The U.S. has not succeeded in providing safety for the people of Afghanistan. At the end of Obama's presidency, Karzai was still the Afghan president. He won democratic presidential elections in 2004 and in 2009. His successor Ashraf Ghani came to power by winning the democratic presidential elections of 2019 (SIGAR, 2020). This seems to suggest that the U.S. succeeded in establishing a democracy in Afghanistan. However, corruption in Afghanistan remains a major problem and might have endangered the true democratic process of the presidential elections, on top of the fact that the U.S. also seems to be biased about who should lead Afghanistan (Browne & Carter, 2009; Creal, 2016; Zia, 2016).

The Global War on Terror entailed much more than just Afghanistan and Iraq. However, when talking about the War on Terror in his campaign, Obama merely mentioned those two countries (Obama, 2008a; Obama, 2008b; Obama, 2008c; Obama, 2008d; Obama, 2008e; Obama, 2008f). So when talking about this promise to end the War on Terror, the focus is on Afghanistan and Iraq. As discussed before, Obama brought back the last troops from Iraq in 2011, which constituted the end of the War on Terror in Iraq. However, with the rise of I.S.I.S. discussed in the first subchapter, terrorism has not left Iraq.

Obama announced the end of the U.S. combat mission in Afghanistan in December 2014 (Obama, 2014). Operation Enduring Freedom comes to an end and introduces Operation Freedom's Sentinel. The U.S. will remain present in Afghanistan to "train, advise and assist Afghan forces and to conduct counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al Qaeda (Obama, 2014)." The fact that the U.S. is still present in Afghanistan today and that groups like the Taliban and Al Qaeda still exist show that the War on Terror is not over. Obama was not able to defeat terrorism during his time as president and terrorists are still in Afghanistan in 2020.

To summarize, this chapter served to compare reality with Obama's promises. It shows that he was more successful with some promises than he was with others. By the end of his presidency he succeeded in ending the war in Iraq, sending extra men and resources to Afghanistan, decreasing war costs in Iraq and Afghanistan, and killing Osama Bin Laden. Obama failed in improving relations with Pakistan and Afghan President Karzai, tackling the drug-trade in Afghanistan, leaving Afghanistan in a safe democracy, and ending the War on Terror.

The next chapter consists of a case study of the drug-trade to increase understanding of why Obama was not able to keep all of his promises. The fight against the drug-trade is a good example of a nation-building aspect that failed, since the drug-trade was present during the entire war and the U.S. tried multiple approaches to stop or decrease it. This case study of U.S. policies towards opium production and trade over the past two decades can therefore show what did and did not work and why.

3. A case study of the poppy trade

To understand why Obama was able to make some promises come true but not others, this chapter will zoom in on one particular promise: to decrease poppy production and trade. This will be used to answer the over-arching sub-question: What were the reasons for Obama’s failure to keep all of his campaign promises? It will take a closer look at all the specifics of the poppy trade to map the intricacies of the social and economic environment and the underlying motivations of the people involved. It will also look at U.S. tactics in counternarcotic efforts and their effects. Since the drug trade was present for the entire duration of the war, it provides a good perspective of the different approaches and effects. Exploring the reasons for failure in decreasing the poppy trade will help in analyzing what the possible explanations are for Obama’s failure to keep all of his promises.

3.1 Before the US invasion

Afghanistan has had a blooming opium trade since before the War on Terror (Parenti, 2015). The funds from this trade were also used for military operations against the Soviets (Felbab-Brown, 2006). During the 1980’s and 1990’s several factors caused poppies to be a good investment for Afghan farmers (Mansfield, 2018b). The Iranian revolution and Pakistani ban on production played a role but especially the Afghan civil wars provided the right circumstances for an increase in poppy production (Mansfield, 2018b). With no government to support agricultural efforts, farmers turned to growing an easy, valuable, and drought resistant crop which was also easy to distribute. Due to terrible living circumstances, the civil war caused an increase in opium use which made the opium demand higher as well. These aspects led to the integration of opium trade in Afghan economy and society even after the civil war under Taliban rule. In an effort to please the UN and international donors, the Taliban banned opium

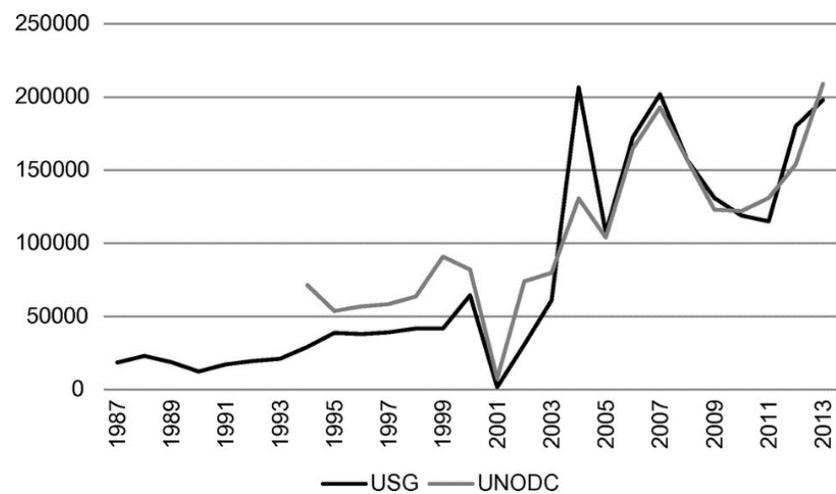


Figure 1 Opium poppy cultivation 1987–2013 (hectares). Adapted from ‘Turning deserts into flowers: settlement and poppy cultivation in southwest Afghanistan’, by D. Mansfield, 2018, *Third World Quarterly*, 39.

production in 2000 which led to a significant decrease in production as shown in Figure 1 (Mansfield, 2018b; Piazza, 2012). The figure shows opium production estimates made by United States Government (U.S.G.) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

3.2 Bush administration

After 9/11, the Taliban lifted the ban and poppy cultivation increased again. Over the course of the war, the profits of poppy production funded terrorist activities and operations against the US (Bewley-Taylor, 2013; Flynn, 2015; Piazza, 2012). After the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, the Bush administration let the United Kingdom (U.K.) take charge in counternarcotic efforts. The U.S. military did not see it as a priority in the beginning and would rather not get involved (Wankel, 2016; Bewley-Taylor, 2013). This is peculiar since the Bonn Agreement in 2001 already recognized the links between organized crime, drug trafficking, and insecurity in Afghanistan (Bewley-Taylor, 2013). This relationship caused a shift in U.S. attitude towards counter-narcotics in 2004 but it was not until 2006 that the U.S. became actively involved in counternarcotic efforts (Bewley-Taylor, 2013). After the initial reluctance to get involved, the U.S. contributed to several different counternarcotic strategies.

Early on in the counternarcotic process, the British used the tactic of compensated eradication. This meant that they would pay farmers to destroy their poppy crops. However, many farmers saw an opportunity here and abused the system. They harvested their crop, showed the British their empty field and collected the money while also selling their product. This way they made money from the same product twice (Zia, 2016).

In 2007 the Bush White House supported a plan to use aerial spraying of pesticides to eradicate the current opium crops (Wankel, 2016; Zia, 2016). The C.I.A., D.O.D., U.K. and President Karzai all opposed this strategy and it was never enacted. Instead, the U.S. implemented a widespread campaign of manual uncompensated eradication in several regions of Afghanistan. This practice was highly unpopular among Afghans and was not actually addressing the root of the problem (Felbab-Brown, 2006). By destroying the farmers crops, the farmer was left without income which resulted in them being in debt (Felbab-Brown, 2006). This often meant that farmers ended up working on a creditor's land to grow poppy. At the same time no actions were taken to undermine the larger structure of opium trade as the basis for the Afghan economy. The farmer was punished for growing poppy but the opium market was left intact.

Eradication was based on the need for short term results instead of long-term solutions which led to false eradication reports (Mansfield, 2018a). The reports would overestimate the amount of poppy crop that was destroyed to please the high expectations. The eradication was partly outsourced to a corporation named Dyncorp which received large amounts of money from the U.S. government (Wankel, 2016). Instead of training Afghan resources for the eradication process, the U.S. made an American service company rich. On top of that, since the poppy trade was such a valuable business, corruption was everywhere. Even President Karzai did not want the counternarcotic efforts to come close to his friends and family (Wankel, 2016). It is impossible to tackle the drug problem without handling the corruption problem, and vice versa.

3.3 Obama administration

When Obama became president in 2009, the counternarcotic policy changed. Instead of focusing on the ground level of the poppy trade, the focus shifted to the higher-level drug dealers and the drug network (Bewley-Taylor, 2013). The widespread eradication stopped and the Obama administration searched for alternatives that would benefit the Afghan farmers and people. An example of this is the Helmand Food Zone (H.F.Z.), a concept supported by both the U.S. and the U.K., which started in 2009.

The goal of the H.F.Z. was to reduce the poppy production in the Helmand province. This province produced approximately half of Afghanistan's poppy each year (Mansfield, 2019). The governor of Helmand, Gulab Mangel, helped the U.S. and U.K. to spread the program's design among the Afghan farmers. Farmers were encouraged to produce wheat instead of poppy while simultaneously a ban on opium was implemented in the region (Mansfield, 2019). They were provided with the means to switch from poppy to wheat if they signed an agreement that they would stop growing poppy. Initially, the results of the program were very positive with a decrease in production of 37 percent in the province (Mansfield, 2019). However, later it became known that it also experienced problems. The first problem was the balloon effect (Mansfield, 2018b; Mansfield, 2019). While poppy is a labor-intensive crop, wheat is not. This displaced many tenants and share croppers when farmers decided to commit to the program. These people would move to the desert and start cultivating poppy there. Production might have decreased in Helmand, it increased in other regions. The second problem is that the program was partly successful because of the support and enforcement of international troops, as soon as they left,

the production of opium started to increase again (Mansfield, 2019). The Afghan forces and government were not able to maintain the program themselves. The third problem was the air of corruption that surrounded the program. The local population felt like the program benefitted the governor and the provincial government far more than it did the farmers (Mansfield, 2019). This countered the efforts to build a credible government in Afghanistan.

3.4 Analysis

The previous subchapters explains multiple factors that are involved in the poppy trade in Afghanistan and how the U.S. has responded to the trade since the invasion in 2001. The Afghan economy and society were embedded with poppy production and trade, even before the U.S. invaded the country. The Bush administration underestimated the role that opium production and trade played in the fight against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. It was not until 2006 that the U.S. became actively involved in counternarcotic tactics, which was mostly based on eradication then. When Obama became president in 2009, he changed the approach to the counternarcotic effort by looking at alternatives for eradication that would be more sustainable for the Afghan farmers. On the surface level, this change of tactics seemed to help, like the H.F.Z (Mansfield, 2018b). However, the following subchapter argues that Obama was not able to curtail the drug trade because corruption played a role in countering his efforts. On top of that, those efforts were based on the wrong ideals in the first place.

It is already very difficult to tackle the drug-trade when your opponents are fighting to sustain it. It becomes even more difficult to do so when your supposed allies are undermining your efforts as well, either deliberately or not. Corruption has played a role on multiple levels of Afghan government, including the presidency (Callen & Long, 2015; Creal, 2016; Browne & Carter, 2009). Roland Paris even states that President Karzai “came to be seen instead as the leader of one of the most corrupt regimes on the planet” (2013, p. 538). Throughout the different approaches in the fight against the drug trade corruption played a role in countering those efforts. Eradication was subject to false reporting because of the quotas that were set beforehand were difficult to reach in reality (Mansfield, 2008a). On top of that, many officials in the government did not shy from bending the rules for their families and friends when it came to protecting their crops, in this case poppy (Wankel, 2016). This meant that the rules regarding opium production were only legitimate for those who did not have any influence in the government. This

undermined the fight against drugs since policies often do not work if they are not enforced consistently. Not only the actual corruption but also the perception of corruption played a part among the Afghan civilians (Mansfield, 2019). Obama implemented programs like the H.F.Z. to provide farmers with alternatives for poppy production. However, even though the programs represented a new direction in the fight against opium trade, the farmers were reluctant to commit to these programs because they felt like the regional government was pocketing money that was meant for the farmers (Mansfield, 2019). All in all, the presence of corruption played a significant role in why Obama was not able to curtail the drug trade.

The second reason for Obama's failure lies in the approach that the U.S. took in trying to address the problem of the drug trade. As discussed previously, Afghanistan had a large opium production capacity before the U.S. invaded the country in 2001 (Felbab-Brown, 2006; Mansfield, 2018b; Parenti, 2015). Opium was a good investment for Afghan farmers because of its resistance to drought, its easy transportability, and the steady market (Mansfield, 2018b). When the Bush administration started its efforts to decrease the opium production and trade, it had no eye for the effects on the civilian level. Eradication destroyed the product that farmers relied on to put food on the table, which left farmers in debt (Felbab-Brown, 2006). Even Obama's progressive programs were not able to give farmers the same security they would have had when growing opium, since the market for the alternative products was not as stable as the opium market. On top of that, it displaced many workers previously working on a tenant basis, which drove them to produce poppy in a different region, only enlarging the area suitable for opium production. In his article, Parenti explains the natural causes for the popularity of poppy and why the wars in the last decades have only increased these causes (2015). The civil wars in Afghanistan destroyed a water irrigation system that was based on underground tunnels that were communally maintained. Both the physical destruction and the decrease in trust in the community caused the water irrigation effectiveness to worsen, which caused more and more farmers to rely on opium crops (Parenti, 2015). The U.S. tried to force an American way of life onto the Afghan society and it did not work. Parenti suggests a bold idea as an alternative for the fight against the illegal drug trade: make it legal (2015). The Afghan farmer would not be required to surrender his livelihood and it would be easier to steer the profits away from the Taliban and decrease the corruption surrounding the drug trade. The main lesson that should be learnt here is that the

existing structures influence the success of the structures that one is trying to implement, the more similar, the more successful.

The poppy trade is representative for the failed nation-building efforts because it exposes two reasons of failure that can be applied to each of the aspects of nation-building separately and as a whole. Especially the Afghan government is crucial in this as it is supposed to unify and represent the Afghan people. As discussed in Chapter two, Obama was not able to leave Afghanistan in a safe democracy. Once again, the most important underlying reasons were corruption and the lack of understanding for the Afghan culture. Before the U.S. became involved, Afghanistan did not have a centralized government and Afghans often relied on social structures for legitimacy of power (Moulakis, 2012). Since the U.S. defeated the Taliban in 2001, international forces have been working to set up a central government and its institutions. This government never became as powerful as the international actors hoped however, it was corrupt and lacked legitimacy (Paris, 2013). Lemay-Hébert explains the distinction between state-building and nation-building (2009). Where the former focuses on establishing all the necessary institutions, the latter focuses on the legitimacy of power based on social-political cohesion. The U.S., both Bush and Obama, failed to take into account the social-political cohesion, it was state-building where it should have been nation-building. On top of that, corruption found its way into the institutions that the international actors were building which led to an even greater lack of legitimacy and representation for the Afghan people.

As discussed in the introduction, suggestions have been made about why the U.S. is still present in Afghanistan and why Obama was not able to leave the country like he promised in his presidential campaign. Some suggested that the reason for the lengthy U.S. presence in Afghanistan was the corruption fueled by the money from international actors and donors that was meant to build Afghanistan up (Suhrke, 2012). Another said that Obama's failure lied in his contradictory strategy since he started the Afghanistan surge in 2009 but also wanted to decrease troops on the ground by 2011 (Chandrasekaran, 2013). This thesis states that Obama's kept his campaign promises to take a different approach in the situation but that two reasons kept him from reaching the final phase of the goals that he set out. The combination of lack of understanding of the Afghan society and corruption is what obstructed Obama in reaching the objectives that he set out in his presidential campaign, despite attempts.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to take a closer look at Obama's presidential campaign promises about Afghanistan and compare them to the reality of his presidency. This was to determine to what extent Obama had been successful in keeping his promises. The first chapter answered the following sub-question: What exactly did Obama promise to do in Afghanistan? It set out nine specific promises divided over three categories: general changes in the defense department, new approaches on the ground, and goals that Obama wanted to reach. He wanted to cut spending by the D.O.D. in the Middle East, refocus to Afghanistan instead of Iraq in the War on Terror, and force Pakistan to be stricter in their attitude towards Al Qaeda and the Taliban. He stated three clear goals that he wanted to reach in his presidency: capture and kill Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants, end the War on Terror in Afghanistan, and leave Afghanistan while it has a democratic government. Obama intended to do this by increasing the amount of troops in Afghanistan, increasing the cooperation with the Afghan government, and tackling the immense drug production and trade in Afghanistan.

The second chapter looked at the policies Obama implemented during his time as president and their effect on Afghanistan through the question: what became of Obama's promises in reality? In some areas Obama's changes were effective and he was able to keep the following promises: ending the war in Iraq, sending extra men and resources to Afghanistan, decreasing war costs in Iraq and Afghanistan, and killing Osama Bin Laden. However, Afghanistan is a complex country with a very different history than the U.S.. Obama was not able to reverse all of the mistakes that the U.S. previously made in Afghanistan and eventually failed in improving relations with Pakistan and Afghan President Karzai, tackling the drug-trade in Afghanistan, leaving Afghanistan in a safe democracy, and ending the War on Terror. The failed promises all fall into the category of nation-building.

Finally, the third chapter sought to find an explanation for Obama's difficulty to keep some promises by taking a closer look at the poppy trade as a case study by answering the last sub-question: What were the reasons for Obama's failure to keep all of his campaign promises? While it is visible that Obama did change the approach to the counternarcotic effort, he was not able to find a permanent and sustainable solution for the drug trade. The opium market has been present in Afghanistan for a long time and the economy is built around it which makes it hard to step away from for farmers. Obama saw the necessity to target people higher up the ranks of the

drug trade, but he was not able to curtail the trade or decrease its influence on security and the nation building efforts. Corruption among Afghan officials countered the efforts against the drug trade. While new programs arose under Obama that shifted the focus from eradication to providing alternatives, this displaced workers and moved them around which created the balloon effect (Mansfield, 2019). One province improved while another declined. The analysis provided an explanation for Obama's failure to keep his promise of tackling the drug-trade. Corruption among Afghan officials and an approach that did not reflect Afghan history undermined Obama's intentions and efforts. These two aspects can be found throughout the U.S. attempts to nation-building and explain why nation-building in general failed.

The research question of this thesis is: 'In what ways has Obama kept his 2008 campaign promises to do things differently regarding policy in Afghanistan in comparison to Bush?' Taking in account all the discussed information, Obama did intend to do things differently and he succeeded in taking a new approach to all of the aspects that he mentioned in his speeches. They were not always enough however. Obama became president in 2009, when the war had been raging for eight years already. A significant amount of damage had already been done to the Afghan society and American reputation. Billions of U.S. dollars had fueled corruption among the ranks of government and the military. The programs and tactics that were used also did not adequately take into account the Afghan history or social and political structure. Who knows what the situation today would have looked like if Obama had been president from the beginning.

Further research could explore what the Trump administration's attitudes towards Afghanistan is and if Trump was able to achieve some of the goals that Obama set out but failed to achieve. Especially aspects that prevented Obama from keeping his promises would be interesting to look at, for example the corruption and large-scale drug trade: How did Trump handle these problems?

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