



Peace and Security Funders Group

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FUNDERS GROUP

IHRFG-PSFG FEDERAL POLICY BRIEFING WASHINGTON DC

THE POLITICS OF WITHDRAWAL: THE CHALLENGES OF PEACEBUILDING AND U.S. MILITARY ACTION IN AFGHANISTAN

Wednesday, March 30, 2011

3:00 – 4:15pm

Speakers:

Matthew Hoh, Director, Afghanistan Study Group

Clare Lockhart, Executive Director, Institute for State Effectiveness

Barmak Pazhwak, Program Officer, United States Institute of Peace

Moderator:

Stephen Del Rosso, Program Director, International Peace and Security, Carnegie Corporation of New York

Stephen Del Rosso introduced the session by pointing to the implications of the current situation we are facing in Afghanistan. The good news is that five million refugees have returned back to Afghanistan, healthcare has improved, there has been an increase in educational services for girls, one sixth of Afghans now have cell phones, and there has been high economic growth rate. Unfortunately this is overshadowed by the bad. 1400 American soldiers have been lost in the struggle, it has been 10 years since the invasion and fighting still persists, and there is endemic corruption. From the implications of what has transpired, it can be concluded that there is no military solution to rebuild Afghanistan. There needs to be some form of a political solution with consensus and involvement from all parties. America has invested so much in the war; spending is at 120 billion dollars a year in Afghanistan, when last week the Japanese discussed spending a mere 360 billion dollars to rebuild their country over five years. It is not only America's hope to see Afghanistan prosper, but in America's best economic interest to see success and development there.



Matthew Hoh started off by describing our situation in Afghanistan as one of stalemate. Every year since 2005 the United States and NATO have increased forces and spending, however the situation has not improved. There has been an increase in conflict as well as an increase in the size of the Taliban and a decrease in support for the Karzai government. Voter turnout has also decreased significantly, indicating a poor morale of the people. There is still a significant number of roadside bombs and assassinations; in the Helmand province they have gone up 600%. Cell phone service is also frequently cut in the Helmand province by

insurgents.

The United States has engaged in the 'clear, hold, and build' strategy, in which the influx of U.S. troops to Afghanistan aims to 'clear' the Taliban from population centers, then 'hold' them until Afghans can 'build' normal lives. With the presence of these American foreign troops, there is a natural advantage of insurgency, as troops are considered outsiders.

Moving forward, it needs to be realized that there can be no winners in this conflict. The insurgents cannot force American troops to leave tactically, nor can American troops simply keep killing insurgent. The only effective solution is engaging in a major political movement, as using military power will only make things worse.



Clare Lockhart stated the importance of not framing the Afghanistan war as a 10 year war, as Afghans have been involved in conflict for over 30 years. The U.S. invasion occurred ten years ago, leading to a several week war, a six year under resourced reconstruction effort, and then a war again in 2007/2008. The extent to which the reconstruction was under resourced is highly underestimated. With the Afghan government possessing such low levels of funding, many civil servants, like teachers and doctors, have had to quit their jobs. The Afghan economy is showing some signs of improvement; however a major focus on the political sphere needs to be maintained.

A major way to incite political change is to centralize the political track. One way this can be possible is through a deal between the major political actors – the Taliban, Northern Alliance, and the government. Another way is to articulate a sufficiently inclusive political framework in which the focus will be on alleviating the tensions and reforming policies that mirror the hopes of the people.

The role of civil society and youth engagement is important in places like Afghanistan, however it can be difficult considering the transitioning government and continued state of war. Many say there is no space for human rights organizations and foundations in Afghanistan, but looking back to other transitions there seems to be a great role played by foundations supporting in civil society groups. By looking back at past efforts elsewhere there can be a lot learned as to what can be done to help create space and amplify the voices already in existence.

One major effort foundations can make is supporting Afghan youth. There has been almost a complete neglect for the youth of Afghanistan – there is lack of education and economic opportunity. One initiative could be creating an endowment for higher education for Afghan youth.



Barmak Pazhwak spoke about the uncertainties of the upcoming 2014 presidential election. The politics of negotiation are also unclear – who is at the discussion table? It is also unknown what will happen to international financial assistance post-withdrawal. The implications of withdrawal, and specifically how to support and sustain a democratic system, must be considered. Mr. Pazhwak asserted that as long as there are sanctions in Pakistan and bad government in Afghanistan, it will be very difficult to end

the war.

Question & Answer

Q: Do we cut our losses and leave? Or are there feasible steps that can be taken? Do you see a continuing role for US?

A: The process will have to be gradual – U.S. forces should be drawn down to 30,000 and troops should be removed from areas where they are serving as catalysts for the insurgency. Mr. Hoh shared that he feels as though Afghans have only been given two choices for political officers – to either support the corrupt Karzai government or the Taliban. These negotiations have to offer more and better choices for the Afghan people.

Clare Lockhart, on the other hand stated that the U.S. must bring down the force level and resource level dramatically. In 2005/2006, the country was close to implosion and perhaps that can be attributed to the surge. There is also a lot happening on the political front, but it has not yet been woven into a coherent framework.

Barmak Pazhwak said that unless we acknowledge the grievances of the people, we will not be able to move on. Currently, there is no neutral space to discuss grievances. As long as the problem of governance is not addressed, Barmak doesn't think re-integration will take place.

Q: Thoughts on a timeline for withdrawal?

A: The transition of handing over districts to Afghan forces does provide opportunities for draw down. Security is still a major challenge to overcome. How can the political process be designed so that it leads to the formation of an inclusive political system?

Withdrawal should start immediately. One impediment is that everyone is driven by the crisis of the moment, for example, the corrupt practices of the Kabul bank. This is resulting in reactive decision-making, without long term strategic thinking.

The speakers concluded by emphasizing the need for regional involvement and support and the urgency of moving forward with a political process within Afghanistan.