

After the Karzai Relection - Succeeding in Afghanistan

The ever-extending duration of the conflict in Afghanistan, its seeming intractability, and our apparent lack of success have led many to question the efficacy of continuing the war. This situation has been compounded by recent events and behaviors including the controversy surrounding President Karzai's flawed reelection, his continued support for known bad actors, his growing intransigence, and the Afghan Government's continued failure to do no more than pay lip service to anti-corruption efforts.

The reality of declining support for the conflict is especially true in Europe, where the Dutch Government has fallen over its support for the war and a number of nations are seriously contemplating withdrawing their forces from the Coalition. Even in the United Kingdom, a staunch U.S. ally, support for the war is waning and the war will likely be a defining issue in the upcoming General Election.

Certainly an emboldened Taliban believes that, at the very least, the European Coalition partners and possibly Canada will soon grow weary of what increasingly seems like an unending and perhaps unwinnable war. Even in the United States, some critics have suggested that Afghanistan could become Obama's Vietnam.

The recent U.S. military surge is a huge step in the right direction. The new military strategy begun by General McKiernan, and continued and expanded by General

McChrystal, with its focus on protecting the Coalition and not Western forces, is also a critical step in the right direction - but is it enough?

I fear the answer to that question is no, because, post election, many of the other key elements of a successful strategy for Afghanistan are still missing or inadequate for the task at hand.

Rest assured ISAF-led military operations first in Kandahar and then Helmand are vital first steps. It is essential to secure the Afghan population from the pervasive influence of the Taliban and buy time for other measures to be implemented.

However, the success achieved at such cost by Coalition and Afghan forces will be wasted if other vital issues such as good governance and rule of law are not addressed quickly and effectively.

Today, I would therefore like to focus on the issues I believe must be addressed following President Karzai's election, if we are to succeed in our mission in Afghanistan.

First, however, one personal observation on how too many see the war.

In my view, far too many of those I encounter in the U.S. Government and academia want to see the situation in Afghanistan as extraordinarily complex, spawning a veritable PAKAF industry of multiple experts, universities and companies. Most claim

they have all the answers and all are trying to spend DoD and State Department funding to prove it.

Yet at the other end of the spectrum everyone hopes the solution to this complex problem is really easy. A military offensive here, a little bit of democracy there, and finally sprinkle some aid dollars around and we can leave before the next election. Or worse still, there are those who have given up on the things we tried and did not seem to work, like democracy and the Afghan Army. Instead, they propose exporting to Afghanistan from Iraq, our successful tribal strategy there, by raising local tribal militias, who it is hoped will somehow defeat the Taliban in the same way that the Sons of Iraq drove off AQ in Al Anbar; a deeply flawed and simplistic assumption not least because Afghanistan is not a tribal society.

In my view, the reality in Afghanistan is quite the opposite. The problem is extraordinarily simple and the solution spectacularly complex.

From my experience Afghans are just like Americans – more accurately New Hampshire or Texan Americans – they optimize the Live Free or Die and frontier spirit of independent minded Americans.

The average Afghan has very simple and very American needs. They do have a sense of national identity but like most Americans it is understated and secondary to local issues until outsiders threaten them. Afghans, like Texans, want a reasonably honest

and moderately effective central Government that does its job and stays out of their lives as much as possible. They want effective representative Government at the local level, which they can then hold personally accountable. They want pious justice administered quickly and fairly – a principle I imagine is shared by many in this room. Afghans need security for their families, which they feel their own communities should provide, backed up by the Central Government through the Army and Police. That sounds like the right to bare arms sentiments of many Americans to me. They need jobs or some other way of making a living and Afghans are smart. Like many Americans, a majority of them consistently make the direct link between unemployment and insecurity. And of course they need access to decent basic services. And by basic services, I mean flood control, irrigation, access to food and fuel, access to medical services and education. In addition, they are tired of war. When given the things they need to stabilize their lives and communities, they have not only rejected the Taliban, as the success of the National Solidarity Program shows, but they have physically defend what they have worked so hard to get and driven off the Taliban.

The only real challenge we face in determining what they need and want is to avoid assuming that all districts and provinces are the same. The hard part is in fixing the problems and helping the Afghans to get what they want. To do that the United States and the international community has to face up to the costly and complex

realities of successful counter insurgency strategy and the need to commit sufficient resources and time to make the changes that are needed - a simple problem that requires an extraordinarily complex solution.

Sop, if we are going to succeed in Afghanistan, what then do we need to understand and do now that the dust has settled on the Afghan elections? In my view we need to understand and do the following:

Securing Influence not Terrain

Before one can have effective representative Governance, one must first have security and in order to have security the Coalition has to understand that it is battling the Taliban for influence not terrain.

The key to the success of the Major offensive and subsequent such operations, is not to drive out Taliban fighters from these communities but the reduction and eventual elimination of their influence. We can occupy every town and mountaintop and yet fail, if the Taliban can maintain its influence. And they can do this simply by sending a couple of fighters into an area to post night letters and through the killing of a few prominent local leaders. The Taliban understand, what we have failed to understand for too long. That we are both fighting for dominant influence with this contested population, which can then be used to build support for oneself and undermine support for ones enemies.

Our enemies have some significant advantages in this struggle for influence. They typically share a similar cultural and ethnic background with the population in which they hide and operate. They can instinctively, and by design, tap into shared narratives and a common faith, albeit one that they have significantly distorted.

They understand, often share and can easily manipulate preexisting grievances, enmities and hatreds and use these emotions to maintain a community support base. Most importantly, they can exploit ethnic and tribal loyalties, traditional and religious leadership, and formal and informal legal systems to exert and maintain their control or those who fear and resent outside intrusions and the impact of modernity.

The Taliban can also deploy a compelling argument that appeals to key segments of the population, by arguing that support for them will lead to the redress of community grievances, restoration of honor and respect, protection of traditions, community and faith, revenge for real and perceived injustice and casualties, purification of Islam and/or the return of Muslim or ethnic power and prosperity.

Compelling arguments to the disenfranchised, angry, huddled masses. Arguments that should sound familiar to all of you, as all politicians use these arguments to get elected. Which is why our politicians promises to improve our quality of life, repeal unpopular legislation, maintain our traditions and protect our communities can so often persuade us to vote for change at elections.

Perhaps most importantly of all, the Taliban expertly exploit intimidation tactics and violence to bolster or supplement their arguments and inducements. In Ireland, it included summary execution, tar and feathering, and kneecapping; in Afghanistan it is night letters, mutilation and beheadings. Similar tactics designed to achieve the same effect – to cow even a supportive population into accepting them and rejecting their Government and us.

It is therefore vital that as well as driving out of a district Taliban fighters; we must also address the reasons why Afghans and particularly Pashtun Afghans are susceptible to the arguments of the Taliban and unwilling to resist their intimidation. Because unless we win this fight for influence with the Afghan people no amount of military force will defeat the Taliban.

The next thing we need to understand is that -

Afghanistan is not Iraq

This might seem like a statement of the obvious but it is not. Many Iraqi experts and veterans are transferring their knowledge of the Iraqi population and conflict to Afghanistan and thinking that the Afghan people and the insurgency we face are just the same. They are most assuredly not. Iraq was a largely urban insurgency.

Afghanistan is a largely rural insurgency. Iraqis are largely illiterate, while Afghans are 70% illiterate. Iraq was a well-organized nation state prior to OIF. Afghanistan has not been since the early 1990's. Afghanistan has been stressed by 30 years of conflict.

Most Iraqis had not. Religious division heavily influenced the conflict in Iraq but this is not the case in Afghanistan where there is surprisingly little religious division. Iraqi is a tribal society. The Pashtun Afghans are a clan and family based community with huge differences and little contact between communities' only miles apart. Not least because of geography. In Iraqi, Al Qaeda fermented ethnic division; in Afghanistan, for the most part, they have not been able to do so. Iraqis can be exceptionally violent towards each other; Afghans are not so much. There was more than one insurgency in Iraq; AQ, former Baathists, Shia extremists, but each was well organized with senior leadership control. In Afghanistan, there is only one insurgency but it is highly fragmented and central control is limited. The role of foreign fighters is far less important in Afghanistan than in Iraq. In Iraq, the insurgents rarely engaged in face-to-face combat, in Afghanistan, it is commonplace. In Iraq, while foreign fighters came from neighboring countries, they did not have a permanent safe heaven providing a place to retreat and regroup. The Taliban have such a place in Pakistan, which is our ally not an enemy state like Iran. I could go on but the point is made I think. It is therefore essential that our troops and diplomats develop a new and far more nuanced understanding of Afghanistan, on a district-by-district, valley-by-valley basis, and do not extrapolate their Iraqi experience to the valleys and mountains of Southern Afghanistan.

Next we have to consider the issue of Corruption before we think about democracy can be expanded and improved because in Afghanistan -

Corruption – Root of all Evil

Corruption touches nearly every aspect of an Afghan's life, requiring payment to obtain essential services; to acquire passports, permits, licenses, and other official documents; to secure jobs; and to obtain medical attention, to list just a few examples. Many Afghans seem resigned to this situation, even while describing such corruption as un-Islamic and a plague on Afghan society. However, it does magnify hugely their dissatisfaction with their Government and is a propaganda coup for the Taliban.

In the many surveys conducted by my company, a majority of Afghan respondents say that they lack confidence in the Afghan legal establishment's ability or willingness to end the corruption, given that most police officers, lawyers, and judges reportedly profit from corrupt practices.

The US-led Coalition must therefore force through fundamental top to bottom anti-corruption measures and a robust monitoring system in key Afghan ministries. Token measures from President Karzai will not suffice. And encouragement from President Obama to take steps to end corruption will have little or no impact. As the media reported just yesterday, we cannot even persuade President Karzai to remove his own brother from office, let alone persuade him to deal with systemic government corruption? However, the reality is that, if we cannot find a way to persuade

President Karzai to tackle corruption quickly and decisively, Afghan public support will continue to evaporate and the ranks of the Taliban will swell.

Additionally, if we do not demand and support the introduction of comprehensive anti-corruption measures, the Afghan people will increasingly see us as propping up a corrupt and dysfunctional Government.

Key elements of this anti-corruption strategy must include:

- The removal of corrupt senior officials, in all key ministries, and the prosecution of the most obvious and prominent offenders. Making an example of well-known corrupt senior officials will buy time with the Afghan public, which can be used to implement far-reaching reforms.
- While going after the big fish, measures should be enacted at all levels to change the culture of corruption to a culture of lawfulness. This is particularly important at the district level. The level that ordinary Afghans interact with most often and which can be the source of their greatest frustration.
- When introducing reforms, the culture of impunity for the rich and well connected must be ended and there must be dire consequences for corruption: anti-corruption measures without accountability and punishment will be ineffective and distrusted.

- The enforcement of anti-corruption measures will quickly become politicized, i.e. investigators/prosecutors going after their enemies while protecting their benefactors. This has to be resisted with direct international supervision of the reform and anti-corruption program. The recent parliamentary intervention in the choice of President Karzai's cabinet is a good example of this, with just as many good men as bad were denied cabinet positions. Our media hailed this parliamentary intervention without realizing that most blocked cabinet appointments were politically motivated and designed to remove rivals not corrupt candidates.
- We need strong civilian mentors in key ministries. Experienced senior advisors who can stay for six months or more and who can both improve performance and keep Afghan officials honest.
- We support the establishment of independent internationally supervised audit offices and internal affairs organizations in key ministries and at each level of Government.
- Anti-corruption efforts must be entirely transparent and well publicized to gain public support and counter Taliban propaganda.
- The population must be involved throughout the process through the creation of independent complaints committees at all levels of Government.

The implementation of an internationally supported anti corruption campaign will be resisted by the Afghan Government and will require significant resources and international resolve but without it I fear all other efforts to stabilize the country will ultimately fail. I think it is therefore time to make the continued US and international community commitment to Afghanistan conditional on the acceptance of these minimum reform requirements. This may be the only way to persuade the Afghan Government to act.

While dealing with corruption we also have to deal with Afghanistan's dysfunctional democracy, by believe it or not providing Afghan's with more democracy not less.

Democracy — More Not Less

The Afghans want representative governance. They want to choose their own government and they want that government to represent their interests. Yet many say they do not see their government as representative and certainly not below the national level. This is because Afghanistan lacks a truly representative form of government below the national level and a dysfunctional form of Governance at the national level, a situation made worse by the recent flawed Presidential election.

Frankly, Afghan democracy reminds me of the pre-Cromwellian era in the UK - a weak parliament that advised but did not control an all too powerful Monarch. The Afghan parliament is a largely ineffective institution that lacks the power and will to confront President Karzai. On the one hand, it is not the source of representative

Governance, with a ruling party or Coalition appointing a Prime Minister and with the President acting as head of state and the check on Parliamentary power. Neither is it an American style Congress providing a check on the powers of the President. In reality therefore, we have an all-powerful president who appoints the provincial and district governors and the heads of the judiciary, army, and police, with very little effective oversight or control coming from parliament.

This is a source of great resentment for many Afghans, especially the Pashtun, who also see significant ethnic bias and nepotism in the President's appointments. This, in turn, undermines support for the government at all levels.

Again, being frank, this may be one genie that we can simply not put back in the bottle. We probably cannot find a viable way to curb the powers of the President at the national level nor make the Afghan parliament more effective. There is however one reform that would work and which we could force the Afghan government to introduce.

If you recall, early in this presentation, I commented that Afghans were like New Hampshire and Texan Americans. They do not much care for powerful central Government. Instead they prefer to run their own lives as much as possible, with as little national Government involvement as possible. At the local level, they already have one of the oldest forms of representative governance in place, through the village elders who are vested with authority over the community by the community.

This form of representative local governance has now been successfully modernized through the National Solidarity Program. In my view the NSP is the only truly successful development program in Afghanistan. This program requires each community to elect a Community Development Council or CDC to represent the community in the development and execution of development projects, which are funded through the central government. These CDCs, which work with the NSP managers and the district government are so successful that they are living on after the end of a development project and supplanting the traditional village elder system. Not least because of the effective working relationship the CDC establishes with the district government. When one combines this model, which proves the Afghans can make a form of democracy work, with the fact that most Afghans interact most often with the district level of Government, the solution to the lack of representative governance in Afghanistan becomes readily apparent – district elections.

In my view as part of our strategy for Afghanistan, we must persuade and if necessary force President Karzai and the Afghan parliament to exceed to the devolution of power and governance from Kabul to the lowest levels of Afghan society. The provision for district elections is already in the Afghan constitution and we must insist that the Afghan Government agree to hold district elections within the next two years, if not sooner; an electoral process that we must monitor very closely to ensure its integrity.

Such elections will allow ordinary Afghans a say in how Afghanistan is run at the level most important to them, and will I believe, help dissipate their anger with the Afghan Government. These elections once implemented should be followed by provincial elections. The combination of these two reforms will significantly reduce the power of the presidency and go some way toward encouraging reform at the national level.

Local elections will also offer a legitimate path to local power for reconciled former Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) and their leadership. If you like the Northern Ireland model where terrorist leaders are elected and become legitimate provincial leaders. A solution to the “Troubles” that, somewhat ironically, the US Government strong-armed the British to accept and embrace.

In summary, only local elections can succeed in extending good governance to all areas of Afghanistan and will go a long way toward ending the abuse of power by Kabul based politicians and bureaucrats, which swells the ranks of the Taliban.

However, before I conclude there other several critical issues that need to be addressed because democracy cannot prosper in an unstable society. The first is dealing with the many flaws in Afghan legal system.

Afghanistan is a society with many points of friction. The feudal, tribal and ultra-conservative nature of its society and the impact of over 30 years of occupation and civil war have created numerous points of conflict/dispute in a country that has

always lacked a reliable, centrally administered and timely source of organized justice. This is compounded by the lack of a national land registry and disputes resulting from the recent civil war.

The result is frequent local disputes, often over land and other property, which need to be resolved quickly before they escalate. Most Afghans agree however that the Rule of Law is failing in many areas of Afghanistan and that it is almost impossible to obtain timely and impartial dispute resolution and fairly administered justice.

Afghans also consistently demonstrate an acute sense of how justice should be administered. They are happy for certain simple disputes to be dealt with by village elders and for certain domestic issues to be resolved by their Imam. This would be a model that I think most God fearing Americans would applaud. However, for more serious issues and where simple disputes cannot be resolved locally, they look to their Government to provide solutions - for the police to conduct criminal investigations and for the courts to administer pious, fair and timely justice. The piety of the Government system is very important because most Afghans want their legal system to be rooted in Islam, as the constitution of this Islamic state dictates.

In the absence of pious, timely and fair justice, the Taliban fills the vacuum with its shadow courts. Despite few if any Taliban judges having any formal Islamic legal training Afghans accept their verdicts, even though their punishments are draconian,

because they are seen as fair, pious and providing rulings and punishments in a timely fashion something too many Afghans do not get from their Government.

It is therefore essential that Kabul law is extended down to the lowest levels and all levels are monitored to ensure that justice is impartially and legitimately administered.

One idea to consider is the introduction of circuit court system similar to that used in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th century. Given that for some disputes, the Afghans prefer the adjudication of village elders, we should also consider the introduction of the British magistrates court, where the great and the good from the local community, suitably trained, empowered and monitored, administer justice on behalf of the state.

We should also consider extending the concept of the Focused District Development program to the justice system. The FDD program replaced local police with more competent national police officers for a set period, while the local police were given additional training and better equipment. During this period, the replacement national police helped stabilize an area and the better-trained local police were more effective on their return to the community. A similar approach would work with ineffective and corrupt local courts.

Finally, we must promote the piety of the existing Afghan system, where 89% of Afghan judges are trained in Islamic law, and can give the Afghan people what they desire - a legal system firmly rooted in Sharia. If we fail in this mission we will

continue to see the spread of Taliban kangaroo courts, purporting to be Sharia based and with it the extension of tentacles into every corner of Afghan society.

Quality of Life

Afghanistan is without doubt one of the poorest countries on earth. One only has to spend a few days in Kabul—let alone in the remote districts of the border provinces—to encounter abject poverty and despair. For most Afghans, life is a daily struggle to survive. In survey after survey conducted by my company, Glevum Associates, Afghans understandably report that securing jobs and/or an income is critically important to them and almost impossible to achieve. As is access to essential services such as health care, free water, irrigation, education, electricity and roads. Yet, efforts to develop Afghanistan's economy and infrastructure are woefully inadequate. Most Afghan respondents understand the direct link between their inability to find work and care for their families, and the increase in criminality and support for AGEs. Indeed, in one recent Glevum survey a majority of Afghans identified the lack of jobs as the second most likely cause of instability and the unemployed as the second most likely to cause a security problem.

The Taliban understands this dynamic and has sought to establish shadow government in many districts and to provide welfare programs and incomes for unemployed young men. Bored, disaffected, and angry unemployed young men offer ripe pickings for the AGE recruiters, who offer hope, honor and income to those without any. When this is combined with a coercive element and peer and community

pressure, it is easy to see why the ranks of the Taliban are growing. Yet, many Afghans indicate that they would resist the AGE recruiters if they had alternatives—if they had jobs; if they could secure funds to expand farms and start businesses; if the Government would invest in roads and irrigation to help them prosper.

The inability of the Afghan government to provide for all its people (despite some successes with key development programs such as the National Solidarity Program) also encourages them to seek alternative often-criminal sources of income. The cultivation of drugs is the most obvious example. It also encourages others to exploit the country's few natural resources leading to a potential environmental disaster in some areas. For example, in some districts respondents report that the only “export” is wood for fires. As there is no program of sustainable development, this leads to deforestation and erosion, new problems that Afghanistan can ill afford. We must therefore have a coordinated program to address these issues while fighting the Taliban. A strategy we call Secure and Build, which I will cover shortly.

Dealing With Illiteracy — Education, Education, Education

Most Afghans interviewed agree—illiteracy undermines almost every facet of public and private life in Afghanistan. They say it denies opportunities to those who cannot read or write. It diminishes the effectiveness of key institutions, such as the police and army, which are forced to recruit illiterate candidates. It seriously undermines

government efficiency. It significantly reduces the intellectual capacity of the country, which is utterly inadequate already to support the development of a viable economy and modern society. It perpetuates the endemic corruption that plagues Afghan society and it fosters ignorance, intolerance, and superstition. Even some traditional and ultra-conservative tribal elders lament the high levels of female illiteracy, on one level, because it limits the availability of female doctors, midwives and nurses to reduce the appalling levels of female and child mortality. Perhaps most importantly of all, Afghans say, it reduces the availability of teachers who can break the country's cycle of illiteracy.

We must therefore support the development of an effective education system that recruits enough teachers who have graduated from a class above the one they teach. Who are paid a decent wage on time and who are resourced with a curriculum and books? In addition, we have to end corruption in the education process.

Reconciling the Reconcilable

Expanding on the theme of reconciliation, we must support a proactive AGE reconciliation program and create a path for them to legitimate power through local and district elections. There can be no peace in Afghanistan without reconciliation of the reconcilable and in particular the Afghan Taliban leadership who will not be encouraged by a few dollars and amnesty. There is peace in Northern Ireland today because of a successful reconciliation program, that included a distasteful but

necessary amnesty, and because terrorist leaders were co-opted into the political process. As Tony Blair said, “we took the violence out of the politics in Northern Ireland”. This peace process needs to be replicated in Afghanistan no matter how unpopular with some Afghan leaders.

Security — Afghan National Police and Army

Everyone knows that the Afghans must take over the fight for themselves and we must therefore support the careful reform and gradual expansion of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP), as well as the wider justice sector to include the Ministry of Interior, the judiciary and the prison system.

Without reform, simply increasing the size of the ANA and ANP will magnify their many shortcomings and undermine their limited strengths. Reform and expansion measures should focus on improving the quality and competence of the existing force and its gradual expansion not on a rapid expansion that will magnify the many faults and undermine the its strengths.

Military Mission

Finally, it is just as important that the extra troops we deploy do the right thing. More troops doing the wrong thing will only make matters worse. We must therefore support General McChrystal’s focus on population protection rather than killing

insurgents. In the short-term, this strategy may result in more American casualties. We therefore need to fortify our national resolve for more losses before the situation improves. However, as Iraq has shown, our casualties are reduced exponentially as the situation improves and the local population willingly provides critical intelligence and even takes the fight to the enemy themselves. In addition, the following concepts must be implemented:

Our troops must focus on securing insurgent strongholds only where we have the capacity to usher in development and governance shortly thereafter. Killing bad guys achieves little if the local community does not feel secure and that their quality of life does not improve

We must adjust the “clear, hold, build” construct to “secure and develop”, a near simultaneous approach combining military operations and development to permanently win over the population. Only with the population as part of the solution, can we transform the rural areas. The positive impact of the NSP/CDC approach shows this can work.

The population favors ANA security over coalition security. The ANA therefore has to be pushed out front and given lead security responsibility in certain areas within

their capability-- now. Their best is often good enough, even when it falls well below our own minimum standards.

Conclusion

The measures I have outlined above will not be easy or cheap. They will not achieve as quickly as some would like but more quickly than most would believe. However, failure to deal with these issues will I fear lead to three outcomes.

- Increasing demands for the withdrawal of Coalition forces before Afghanistan is stabilized and can stand on its own two feet
- The collapse of Afghanistan into another decade of civil war
- And the expenditure of the precious blood of our military and supporting civilians and our dwindling national treasure for in an insufficient return on this costly investment

Now for questions