



Passing the BATON

*Foreign Policy Challenges and
Opportunities Facing the New Administration*

Session Five: “Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan: Identifying Priorities”

Speakers: **Zbigniew Brzezinski**, Former National Security Advisor
Lakhdar Brahimi, Former Special Advisor to the Secretary-General, United Nations;
Daniel Serwer, Vice President, Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations, United States Institute of Peace
Mowaffak al Rubaie, Iraqi National Security Advisor

Main Issues

The panel considered four Middle East countries that separately and together present a critical foreign policy and national security challenge to the United States. Each country has a discrete bilateral relationship with the U.S. that includes issues of importance to both countries. However, these countries are linked in many respects to each other, to other regional states and to U.S. interests collectively.

The panel members focused on how the U.S. should deal with each country, while maintaining a constant awareness of how its actions will affect the larger whole. Brzezinski said he could think of only one eventuality that would turn U.S. relations with these four states into a single policy issue – a US-Iran war. This would involve the U.S. in a military conflict with four countries with a total population of 300 million people, a prospect the United States should avoid.

In addressing U.S. relations with each of these states, the panel did, however, identify some common themes. These included the overwhelming importance of national ownership and meeting the needs of each country’s population; the necessity of combining diplomatic with military initiatives; the need to engage all the neighboring states in a dialogue on security, development and other issues; and the requirement for international legitimacy for U.S. actions.

Policy Conclusions*

In addressing these countries individually, the panelists drew the following conclusions about U.S. policy toward the countries:

Iraq

* Policy Conclusions from Group Panel Discussions at Passing the Baton 2009 were not necessarily achieved by group consensus. In some instances, individual panel members may have been in disagreement with the larger group. For specific information on each panel’s contents, please see the comprehensive online archive at www.usip.org/baton2009.



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1. The drop in violence in Iraq is the result of Iraqi rejection of al Qaeda's foreign ideology and brutal tactics, the increased efficiency of Iraqi Security Forces, the surge of U.S. forces and the adoption of new tactics.
2. The debate in Iraq has moved from sectarian to political issues, which will be at the core of the forthcoming elections.
3. Signing of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) has confirmed the restoration of Iraqi sovereignty and general agreement on a date certain for a U.S. military withdrawal.
4. The next step is agreement on a plan for U.S. drawdown that will protect U.S. and Iraqi interests and include a dialogue with regional states.
5. Al Rubaie said the Bush era was about liberation and security. The Obama era should result in a comprehensive strategic relationship between the U.S. and a democratic Iraq.

Iran

1. Iran has the means to obstruct any regional peace effort it sees as detrimental to its interests or its regional agenda.
2. Before U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, the U.S. should engage in dialogue with Iran to mitigate possible consequences.
3. Bilateral U.S.-Iranian relations cannot be disentangled from other regional issues.
4. Negotiations with Iran should not be conditioned on Iran's termination of nuclear enrichment, which will be the primary subject for negotiations.
5. Dialogue with Iran could contribute to a helpful Iranian posture regarding Afghanistan.

Afghanistan

1. Mistakes by the international community led to several current problems in Afghanistan. Some of these mistakes include the initial refusal to expand the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) beyond Kabul; the exclusion of all Taliban from the peace process; inadequate assistance in building local institutions; and failure to deal with incompetence and corruption in the Afghan government.
2. The invasion of Iraq absorbed resources and distracted attention from Afghanistan.
3. Afghans welcomed the arrival of U.S. forces and the defeat of the Taliban. However, instability and casualties from U.S. air raids have caused growing Afghan hostility toward foreign forces.
4. The U.S. needs to avoid mistakes made by the USSR, in particular attempting to defeat the insurgency exclusively by military means.



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5. NATO forces must convince the Afghans that they intend to assist the Afghan government to rebuild and deliver essential services.
6. The US should seek a decentralized political settlement with moderate Taliban who are willing to reach accommodation with the Afghan government.

Pakistan

1. No peace is possible in Afghanistan without Pakistan's cooperation, but Pakistan alone cannot bring peace in Afghanistan. Peace must be accomplished by the Afghan government.
2. The U.S. must avoid a war against the Pashtuns, who live on both sides of an unrecognized border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.