



USIPEACE BRIEFING

ESTABLISHING LEADERSHIP ON CIVILIAN ASSISTANCE TO AFGHANISTAN

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USIPeace Briefing: *Establishing Leadership on Civilian Assistance to Afghanistan*

By all accounts, the civilian role in creating a stable Afghanistan, capable of protecting its citizens and providing essential services, is at least as important as the military operation.

President Barack Obama said on December 1, 2009 that 30,000 additional U.S. forces “will help create the conditions for the United States to transfer responsibility to the Afghans.”

But this task cannot be exclusively focused on military forces. The development of Afghan capacity and leadership on the civilian side is also fundamental to our success.

So, who is in charge?

It is very clear who is in charge of military strategy and execution in Afghanistan: the commander of the International Security Assistance Force, General Stanley McCrystal. This was not always the case. In the last few years, the U.S., NATO, and other allies have come a long way in achieving unity of command, precisely because of the deep problems inherent in an atomized approach. On the Afghan side, there are a few key interlocutors – the national army, the national police, the internal intelligence agency, and the national security council – and although their roles are reasonably well defined, there have been calls for higher level coordination on security policy within the government of President Hamid Karzai.

To date, however, the civilian effort on both sides has been uneven, uncoordinated and ineffective. There are many causes for this problem: lack of coordination, lack of prioritization, lack of resources, competition, ineffectiveness, and corruption. There is a United Nations special representative of the secretary-general (SRSG) atop the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which is mandated to coordinate assistance to the Afghan government. Although even UNAMA representatives acknowledge that the combination of bureaucratic complexity in New York and the personnel turmoil in Kabul makes it difficult for UNAMA to perform this role, UNAMA’s authority is moral, not executive. There is also a European Union (EU) special representative, a European Commission (EC) representative, a series of Afghanistan and Pakistan envoys, and embassies full of ambassadors, assistance coordinators, and representatives of bilateral aid agencies.

This complexity is matched on the Afghan side, with ministers of finance and economy, as well as for individual and overlapping sectors such as water, transport, urban development, rural development, and agriculture. There is an Afghan National Development Strategy devised to tie

the government plans all together, but its implementation lacks clear priorities and leadership. Furthermore, donors in capitals, Kabul, and provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) frequently skirt the government and its plans altogether.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

How should the Afghans and their partners transform this scattershot approach into something more streamlined and effective? A critical step is to have someone(s) in charge. There are several options for how to do this, that should be informed by three basic principles.

The first principle must be Afghan leadership. Eight years into the intervention, the publics of all nations involved are wearying. Afghanistan must make dramatic strides towards effective sovereignty in the next two years to reassure everyone that Afghanistan will soon be in control of its destiny, if not fully independent.

The second principle is prioritization. For too long – in part due to an uncoordinated approach – we have been doing too many things poorly instead of a few things well. We are facing a crisis moment, and must therefore focus on the bare necessities for stability. This requires some prioritization and discipline to improve the key areas of security, governance and the rule of law, and agriculture.

The third principle is unity of effort. It is not enough to just agree on priorities, these sectors must benefit from real unity of effort, with a few universally agreed-upon programs receiving the financial support and expertise necessary for success. Such an approach is essential to have lasting impact and to avoid duplication of effort.

THE WAY FORWARD

With those principles in mind, there are a few options to simultaneously enhance both Afghan and international leadership.

On the Afghan side, the solution appears relatively straightforward. President Karzai should appoint a “super-minister” for economic assistance and development: a primary interlocutor for the international community and coordinator for government policy. This could be done by either creating a new position and office – something like an empowered version of the Afghan Assistance Coordination Authority (AACCA) created in 2002 under the post-Bonn Interim

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Administration – or by double-hatting an existing minister. Either way, this new super-minister would require an enhanced staff, composed both of talented Afghans and internationals.

The solution on the international side is somewhat more complicated by the diversity of actors and the imbalance of international funding. At present, the United States provides more than 50 percent of the international assistance to Afghanistan, which will rise to more than 70 percent in 2010. Any solution must have the complete buy-in of the U.S., while at the same time maintaining some international balance in key positions to ensure that the effort does not appear too Americanized.

One approach, proposed and rejected two years ago, is “triple (or quadruple) hatting” – or combining several of the existing international representatives, the U.N./ EU/EC/NATO representatives, into one office. In order for such an approach to be feasible, the representative would have to match all of the membership criteria of these entities, which would limit the field, and could conflict with internal mandates. At a minimum, these offices should be reduced or consolidated to the extent possible, for example combining the EU and EC offices.

Another approach is to create a new coordinator, either in the form of a “lead nation” or a high representative. The U.S. is the only real contender for a lead nation approach, and the new office would presumably be housed within the existing embassy. The lead nation coordinator could have deputies from other key contributors, allowing for a more international approach without having to create an entirely new structure or physical premises.

Alternatively, a new “high representative” would signal a new consolidated approach, but would add to the profusion of representatives, and building a new structure would eat up valuable time.

A third approach is to merge the Afghan and international efforts into one office, headed by the Afghan super-minister with deputies from key countries. For example, the U.S. embassy aid coordinator, the UNAMA deputy SRSG, and the EU/EC representative could all serve as deputies.

The virtue of this approach is that it puts the Afghans clearly in charge, while tying together the vast majority of the assistance into one entity. This center of gravity would also serve to pull in other funding sources, such as the World Bank and the growing aid budgets administered by military forces. A well-integrated structure would both empower and constrain the Afghan super-

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minister, which is essential given concerns about corruption.

On January 28, 2010 in London, the world will gather once again to pledge support for Afghanistan's future and to hear President Karzai's plans.

We cannot let this moment pass without making important changes in the way we all do business, lest the next such conference focus on answering "Who Lost Afghanistan?"

The best of the options outlined above is debatable, but there can be no doubt that new leadership and enhanced civilian coordination is required if we are all to succeed.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This *USIPeace Briefing* was written by Ambassador William B. Taylor Jr., vice president of the Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations at the U.S. Institute of Peace and has served as U.S. assistance coordinator to Afghanistan, Iraq, and the former Soviet Union. J Alexander Thier is director for Afghanistan and Pakistan programs at USIP, and co-author and editor of “The Future of Afghanistan” (USIP, 2009). The views expressed here are not necessarily those of USIP, which does not advocate specific policies.

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The Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations aims to transform societies emerging from conflict by promoting stability, democracy, economic development, and social reconstruction. The Center also conducts research, identifies best practices, develops new tools for post-conflict peace and stability operations, and supports related training and education efforts. William B. Taylor, Jr. is vice president of the center.

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