

Winning in Afghanistan: Summary Remarks

Anthony H. Cordesman

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I would like to stress that I am presenting my views, not those of the other members of the Strategic Assessment Group, and definitely not those of Ambassador Eikenberry, General McChrystal, or any other US, NATO/ISAF, or other official or officer.

I was only one of a team of advisors – who were only a part of an effort involving a wide range of separate military staff planning efforts -- to work that still continues. These are efforts where Ambassador Eikenberry and General McChrystal will present their own views when they are ready, and where the Secretary General of NATO and each ISAF country will make their own contributions and judgments.

My comments also address a far wider range of issues than military strategy. They deal with a broad range of civil as well as military issues, and address the legacy of years of underresourcing, political correctness, dysfunctional behavior, and neglect.

NATO/ISAF and the US face challenges in Afghanistan that go far beyond the normal limits of counterinsurgency and military strategy. They are the equivalent of armed nation building at a time when Afghanistan must both meet major challenges from its own insurgents and international movements like Al Qa'ida, and restructure its government and economy after 30 years of nearly continuous conflict.

It is also a war that must be won after years in which member countries, particularly the United States, failed to react to the seriousness of the emerging insurgency. They failed to provide the proper level of resources and coordination, placed serious national caveats and limits on the use of their forces and resources, and let the enemy take the initiative for more than half a decade.

Seven years into the war, one of the most common impressions in Afghanistan is that the conflict is still being treated as if it was the first year of the war. There are far too many concepts and far too few resourced, coherent operations. Moreover, these problems are far worse and far more critical at the civil levels of the US, UNAMA, and Coalition – and within the Afghan government – than within the military.

There are outstanding people in every civil organization and military component. Many take serious risks in the field. However, the practical reality is a disorganized mess. The impact of years of inadequate resources, stovepipes rather than unity of effort, a lack of realistic goals and measures of effectiveness, a focus on post conflict reconstruction in mid-war, and a failure to come to grips with the limits and corruption of the Afghan government have taken their toll.

What should be an integrated civil-military effort focused on winning the war in the field is instead a dysfunctional, wasteful mess focused in Kabul and crippled by bureaucratic divisions, Afghan power brokering, national caveats and tensions, and a critical lack of resources at every level.

Compounded by the weaknesses in the Afghan government, this has created a situation where the war now has *five, not one*, centers of gravity:

- *Defeating the insurgency not only in tactical terms, but also by eliminating its control and influence over the population.*
- *Creating an effective and well resourced NATO/ISAF and US response to defeating the insurgency and securing the population.*
- *Building up a much larger and more effective mix of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to first support NATO/ISAF, then take the lead, and eventually replace NATO/ISAF forces or limit the mission of the remaining forces to an advisory role.*
- *Giving the Afghan government the necessary capacity and legitimacy at the national, regional/provincial, district, and local levels.*
- *Creating an effective, integrated, and truly operational civil-military effort. NATO/ISAF, UN, member country, and NGO and international community efforts claim a unity of effort they do not have, are wasteful and sometimes corrupt, and often pursue unrealistic and unachievable goals. They provide unintentional aid to both the insurgency and Afghan corruption and the abuses of power brokers.*
- *There also is a de facto “sixth center” of gravity outside Afghanistan and NATO/ISAF’s formal mission. Dealing with the actions of Pakistan, Iran, and other states will be critical to success in Afghanistan.*

I believe that it is still possible to address each of these areas, although not without serious risk. We have wasted too many years. Execution will be difficult and time consuming, but in brief, the key elements of success are clear. They include:

- *Giving the war priority and taking the actions necessary to win.*
- *Fighting the war as armed nation building and not as PCR or in narrow military terms. Give Shape, clear, hold and build real meaning.*
- *Refocusing intelligence to deal with the full range of threat activities, Afghan activities, and net assessment of the actions and effectiveness of each side.*

- *Providing the resources that are needed, understanding that most must come from the US and involve significant military and financial commitments over a period of years.*
- *For the US this means providing additional brigade combat teams and enablers, a real civilian surge, and a near doubling of cost. (\$2.1B to \$4.7B for Embassy alone.)*
- *Accelerating development of the ANSF, doubling its force goals, and reforming the ANP.*
- *Coming honestly to grips with the corruption, and incapacity of the Afghan central government. Working at the provincial, district, and local levels to meet the needs of the Afghan people*
- *Working with our allies to create real world, operational efforts that are part of an integrated civil-military plan.*
- *A new and far more effective and honest approach to aid that focuses on the war until security exists, sets realistic goals, and demands integrity, accountability, and measures of effectiveness.*
- *Constant pressure on Pakistan, but pressure that includes incentives.*
- *Strategic patience and a commitment to an effort that must continue well beyond President Obama's current term.*

It also means defining victory in achievable terms: A reasonable level of security and stability for the Afghan people; progress towards achievable development; and an Afghanistan that will not be sanctuary for international terrorism.