



Peace and Security Summit

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WORKING GROUP: Afghanistan and Pakistan: What Way Forward?

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Session I: Where are we going?

During our first session, the working group debated whether a common vision for Afghanistan and Pakistan exists. We discussed the expectations of the various Afghan, Pakistani, and international constituencies and reached general consensus that there was no common definition of a “steady state” for Afghanistan, Pakistan, or South Asia.

The lack of consensus – in Washington, D.C., particularly – about the myriad challenges we face in Afghanistan and Pakistan is a major obstacle to progress. There is a great deal of uncertainty about U.S. policy and the nature of the U.S. presence in the region beyond July 2011. This discord exists within the U.S. government, among allies, and with the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Further, the “opportunity cost” for the United States of staying in Afghanistan demands further analysis in order to better inform the debate about whether and when to withdraw international military forces. Decisions taken in Afghanistan cannot be viewed within a geopolitical silo as they will have a regional and global impact.

Within Pakistan, the divisions over security issues and strategic policy are stark. There are competing visions among the military, intelligence service, the political leadership, religious leaders, ethnic groups, and the professional class. We must understand all of these visions from the points of view of those who hold them.

The interests of the Afghan people are also famously divided along many of the same lines, but the situation is far more chaotic as Afghanistan lacks a significant history as a single nation in the modern sense. Major interests include security, corruption, and development, but competing visions abound here as well. Both states face common issues that will only sustain conflict and postpone stability, particularly political exclusion of various constituencies and rampant abuse of power at all levels.

Based on the factors listed above, the consensus of the working group is that, with the exception of the overarching objective of defeating and destroying al Qaeda, considerable confusion remains within the US, the international community,

Afghanistan and Pakistan regarding the major goals and objectives for the two countries. While it was agreed that both Afghans and Pakistanis want peace and stability, there was no common definition of an acceptable steady state. A more succinct, integrated, and realistic vision is needed.

Session II: Where are we now?

During the second session, the working group focused on the current situation in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Is there a common understanding of the current tactical, operational, and strategic situation in the region? Again, the general consensus was that there is no comprehensive and agreed-upon assessment.

The way in which the “enemy” or “threat” has been defined and conceptualised has evolved over the past nine years. When discussing “enemies” in this region, we too often assume that the rational actor model applies, which leaves many of the actions and decisions of our enemies outside the scope of our ability to explain them within the bounds of rationality or, at least, *western* rationality.

In Afghanistan, the enemy is not monolithic and cannot be understood in a singular sense. The Haqqani Network, Hizb-i-Islami, and the diffuse Taliban movements do not represent a single insurgency. Many foot-soldiers of these different insurgent groups are often not driven by the same ideological motivations of their leaders, but are rather driven by local factors and grievances. Some of the working group argued that corruption, the lack of good governance in Afghanistan, illiteracy, rampant criminality, the influence of radical Islam, and warlordism are the true enemies.

Some analysts assert the Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan continues to provide logistical, material, and training support to these insurgent groups. If true, does this make the ISI (and hence the Pakistani government) the “enemy”? The U.S. is in a difficult position: the Pakistani security apparatus, America’s key ally in the region, may be a sponsor of hostile insurgent groups. How do we reconcile this?

From 2002 through 2009 the priority for U.S. aid to Pakistan has been the military; however the Pakistani military’s interests often do not align with those of the United States. Pakistan’s India-centric security strategy has major implications and consequences: one of which is the Pakistani military’s push for “strategic depth” in Afghanistan. American aid has failed to eliminate all Pakistani tolerance and support for the Taliban, whether official policy or by default. Further, while there is ongoing internal Pakistani debate over support for armed proxies, such support continues and is unlikely to end.

The consensus of the working group is that the situation in Afghanistan remains grave; despite progress in some areas of the Pakistani border region, the challenges on the Pakistani side remain daunting.

Session III: How do we get there?

Given the lack of coherent policy and strategy objectives coupled with the various assessments of the current situation, the working group tackled the challenge of defining a way ahead. Recognising that there is considerable tension between the “art of the possible” and a vibrant, stable democratic state in Afghanistan, we debated ways to generate systems of governance that would be acceptable to the people and effective in the eyes of the international community. Establishing the legitimacy of the Afghan government, both at the local and the central levels was seen as a paramount requirement for any stabilisation of the country. The widening gap between the Afghan people and the government is potentially a greater threat to long-term stability in Afghanistan than the insurgency.

There were legitimate questions over the utility of the counterinsurgency approach and its potential for success, independent of some reconciliation process. We must, therefore, explore the role of reintegration programmes and reconciliation efforts. These continue to be poorly understood and discussed in vague terms. Is reconciliation a dimension of counterinsurgency - an effort to weaken and divide the enemy? Is it a political process toward conflict resolution? What are the conditions that are conducive towards reconciliation? What are the Afghan Government (and the international community) willing to give up or forgive? What would the Afghan Government (and the Pakistanis, the international community, etc.) expect to receive in return from the Taliban and their associates?

Any reintegration and reconciliation efforts must consider the role of Pakistan. The potential and actual roles of non-ISAF countries in Afghanistan are often neglected – particularly China, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.

The general consensus of the working group was that the July 2011 target date for initiation of U.S. military withdrawal was counterproductive to the efforts both in terms of general counterinsurgency objectives as well as any reconciliation efforts that may be initiated by President Karzai. Rather than providing an incentive to accelerate handover to the Afghans the deadline is generally perceived to work in the favour of the insurgency and reinforces the expectation that the U.S. and the West will prematurely depart the region.

Recommendations

The U.S. and its allies must achieve a better understanding of the competing visions within Pakistan and Afghanistan among the myriad social and political actors that exercise various forms of control, influence, and power.

The U.S. must provide greater clarity of the objectives and goals for Afghanistan and Pakistan beyond “disrupting, dismantling, and destroying al Qaeda”. Specifically define an acceptable sub-optimal steady state for Afghan institutions while being mindful of the competing visions among the Afghans and Pakistanis.

The U.S. and the international community must work to change the Pakistan-India relationship, moving from a zero sum approach to constructive engagement.

Reconciliation and reintegration are likely to be the means through which stability is achieved. The Afghan, Pakistani, and U.S. governments must reach consensus on terms and goals for reconciliation. As negotiations with the Taliban are considered, avoid setting any pre-conditions, such as insisting on acceptance of the Afghan constitution and women's rights, as this only creates opportunities for spoilers to prevent dialogue. This does not mean the Afghans and the U.S. should give up these red lines, but that these lines need not be made a precondition of initiation of negotiations. A political settlement is an inevitable requirement for peace and stability.