

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
AFGHANISTAN: WHAT IS AN ACCEPTABLE END-STATE AND HOW DO WE GET THERE?
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Let me begin with three very different and dramatic images.

First, consider the image of our troops posted in remote and often barren outposts in the mountains and valleys of Afghanistan, working under fiercely difficult conditions to protect villagers and fight the Taliban. In the aftermath of Osama Bin Laden's death a former paratrooper with the U.S. Army Special Operations Command wrote of his deployment: "Our job was to build a sustainable nation in a Mad Max wasteland, and we did our duty."¹ The crazy lawlessness of Mad Max similarly permeates the Oscar-nominated documentary *Restrepo*, as well as the descriptions of other outposts in the Korengal Valley in Bing West's 2011 book *The Wrong War*.

The second image is of the extraordinary operation carried out by the highly skilled and trained team of Navy SEALs who carried out the successful attack against Osama Bin Laden's compound. Amid the deep satisfaction of having finally caught the man who symbolized Al Qaeda and the attacks on 9/11 more than any other has been a deep pride in the capabilities, organization, and preparation of these young men and the intelligence, analysis, and institutions behind their operation. They succeeded in accomplishing a key piece of the mission our troops are in Afghanistan to do: degrading and destroying Al Qaeda. But this success did not follow

¹ D.B. Grady, "Veteran's Day," *The Atlantic*, May 2, 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/05/veterans-day/238138/>

from state-building operations on the ground in Afghanistan itself. Indeed, the operation did not even take place in Afghanistan, but in Pakistan.

The third image is of young Arabs from Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, and now Syria mustering the courage to face bullets, beatings, and brutality to claim their basic rights as human beings: to speak and assemble freely, to participate in deciding how they will be governed, and to hold their governments accountable for the provision of basic services and the possibility of a better life. The determination of these protesters, in the millions, to demand far more of their rulers, even in desperately poor and conflict ridden countries, is exactly the attitude of responsibility and self-reliance that we hope to see among the people of Afghanistan, but do not. Instead, reports from the field all too often describe a culture of dependence, corruption, and inflated expectations that we have helped to create.

As we re-examine our goals in Afghanistan and the next phase of how to secure those goals, it is worth bearing these three images in mind and reflecting on both the connections and the disjunctions between them.

The Afghanistan We Seek

We seek a secure, stable, and self-reliant Afghanistan that does not provide sanctuary for al-Qaeda and that is a cross-roads for an increasingly prosperous and secure region.

A secure Afghanistan: A secure Afghanistan would be a country with low levels of violence that is defended and policed by its own local, regional, and national forces. Security means not only an end to open conflict between the government and insurgents and/or warlords, but also the kind of everyday safety that allows citizens to go to work and to send their children to school. It means a country free from the continual fear of violence or death, whether targeted or random.

Establishing that kind of security across Afghanistan requires not only building up Afghan police and military forces but also creating the incentives for them to risk their lives for the sake of protecting their people. It also means *removing* U.S. troops as focal points and targets for Taliban attacks, attacks that end up alienating the very villagers that our soldiers seek to protect and win over. COIN assumes that if we protect and serve the population of a village they will have incentives to give us the information we need to protect ourselves and drive out the enemy. In some cases, for some periods of time, that has proved true. But it is a strategy that assumes the troops providing protection are there to stay for as long as it takes to erase the possibility of retaliation by the enemy that was informed upon. As long as villagers know that we are going to leave some day, as we will, and as long as they lack faith in their own government to protect them, their instincts for self-preservation will tell them to keep quiet. Their incentives are to go with the winner, not make us the winner.

The only real long-term security flows from competent and honest government, whether in a village in Afghanistan or city neighborhoods in the United States. Real security in Afghanistan can come only if the central government either has the incentives to choose and keep capable and honest local and regional officials or a new constitution allows for more decentralized election of such officials and mechanisms for citizens to hold them directly accountable. Honest and capable Afghan officials exist. The most frustrating and often heart-wrenching stories over the past decade are those of mayors or police chiefs or governors who temporarily succeeded in serving their people, only to be murdered without retribution or deliberately fired by the central government and replaced with cronies.

The key question going forward is how to align the Afghan government's incentives with serving the interests of its people at every level. Many different strategies have been tried, but if we are

in fact embarking on a public transition, we make clear that we will be investing in winners. Our development dollars, our civilian assistance, and our military advising and support will flow to those villages, towns, cities, and provinces that demonstrate the ability to help themselves. When a competent official is replaced with an incompetent one, we will shift resources elsewhere.

In the short term, adopting this strategy could well mean accepting *less* success for U.S. dollars, in the sense of fewer program outcomes or even less territory secured. Military commanders and civilian program administrators have to be able to pull the plug on partially secured territory as soon as Afghan forces demonstrate that they are unwilling to take sufficient responsibility for local security and on partially completed programs when local civilian officials fail to meet a basic standard of competence. The message at every turn must be that we have a strong interest in seeing Afghans succeed in securing and rebuilding their country, but such an interest that it means we will do the job in their stead.

A Stable Afghanistan: Stability means predictability. Real stability cannot be imposed or even won by military force. It requires a political settlement that is sufficiently accepted by all sides to create a long-term political equilibrium. And the sooner we begin constructing that equilibrium the better.

In a speech at MIT last week former British Foreign Secretary David Miliband argued that “a political settlement is not one part of a multi-pronged strategy in a counter-insurgency; it is the overarching framework within which everything else fits and in the service of which everything else operates.”² He recommends that Western countries fighting in Afghanistan set out a unified and strong vision addressing the security situation, possible amendments to or interpretations of

² David Miliband, *The War in Afghanistan: Mending It Not Just Ending It*, Speech delivered at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, April 13, 2011, <http://davidmiliband.net/speech/the-war-in-afghanistan-mending-it-not-just-ending-it/>.

the Afghan constitution, basic human rights guarantees for all Afghan citizens, and the best model of governance for Afghanistan. Such a vision, he contends, will provide a diplomatic benchmark against which all the negotiating parties can begin to adjust their positions.

I can see value in such a course. But I would not presume to outline a specific diplomatic strategy here. The business of diplomacy is figuring out the fastest and best way to get the parties to the table with positions that are sufficiently real and flexible to allow for a lasting bargain to be forged. Regardless how we get negotiations on a political settlement underway, however, the great advantage to actually beginning the political end-game, rather than continually contemplating it, is that it will force multiple players to begin to reveal their true preferences about what they will and will not accept. Only with a sense of real red lines on all sides can a lasting deal be constructed.

The death of Osama bin Laden creates a new opportunity to begin real negotiations. The Afghan government has greeted the death of Bin Laden by arguing simultaneously that U.S. forces should be focusing on Pakistan rather than Afghanistan, since that is where the real terrorists are. At the same time, the leader of the Afghan opposition, former foreign minister and presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah, noted immediately that U.S. forces will still be needed in Afghanistan for a long time to come.³ The United States has already made clear that the death of Osama Bin Laden is not the end of the war in Afghanistan. But we should now mark this moment as the beginning of the end, a moment that allows us to pivot toward a comprehensive political statement that will bring security and stability to Afghanistan and greater security to Pakistan while still allowing the United States to take whatever measures are necessary to protect

³ Ben Birnbaum, "Afghan Opposition Leader: International Presence Still Needed after Bin Laden's Death," *The Washington Times*, May 2, 2010, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/may/2/abdullah-international-presence-bin-laden-death/>.

ourselves against al Qaeda. This pivot will help create a new set of strong incentives for the Afghan government to engage in the kind of behavior on both the development and defense side that warrants our continuing assistance.

A final political settlement must be durable enough and consistent enough with the basic rights and interests of all Afghan citizens to allow all countries, corporations, and individual citizens to invest in Afghanistan's economic and social capital. Predictability is the prerequisite for any kind of long-term investment, and Afghanistan needs the kind of investment that will employ its growing youth population, its newly educated women and girls, and its different tribes and ethnic groups. The architects of a political settlement must thus pay equal attention to provisions that will provide a foundation for Afghanistan's economic future from trade and investment rather than foreign assistance.

A Self-Reliant Afghanistan: U.N. officials and experienced veterans from Non-Governmental Organizations often point out that it is impossible actually to build the capacity of a foreign government when the inflated salaries offered by foreign governments, NGOs, and international institutions drain all local talent from local institutions. When Afghan engineers make more as advisers (or even as translators and drivers) to Westerners, it is small wonder that local and national government bureaucracies fall short. Moreover, the large sums of aid pouring in to a very poor country inevitably contribute to growing corruption.

Moving forward in Afghanistan, it is vital to be much more aware of our own inflationary footprint on the Afghan economy and the expectations of the Afghan people. It is worth investigating how governments and other organizations can possibly conform much more to local conditions and pay-scales, as many of our soldiers certainly do. At the same time, we need

a far greater focus on finding export markets for Afghan farmers and entrepreneurs and on socially as well as economically profitable ways to exploit Afghanistan's mineral sector.

The recent agreement by Pakistan and India's commerce secretaries to improve trade ties across a wide range of sectors and a new-found confidence among Pakistani businessmen that they can compete in India's markets are promising signs of a willingness to make long-held aspirations of broader regional markets a reality. Both Pakistan and India's leaders understand the vital importance of economic growth and the value in weaving their two economies closer together. At the same time, Pakistan has been proposing closer economic ties with Afghanistan in ways that could have a direct impact on China and India. Add to this mix a proposed natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan to India, as well as a \$500 million project financed by the Asian Development Bank to build a thirteen-hundred-megawatt, high-transmission power line carrying electricity produced by hydropower of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan through Afghanistan to Peshawar in Pakistan, and possible energy deposits in Afghanistan itself, and the outlines of a regional energy market begin to emerge. The path to greater Afghan self-reliance is likely to run through greater regional economic integration.

Afghanistan's rich mineral resources are already attracting massive investment, with China the winning bidder for a \$3 billion project to exploit Afghanistan's largest copper mine. The agreement commits China to build a power plant that can provide electricity to much of Kabul and to finance and build Afghanistan's first railroad, which will run to the Chinese province of Xinjiang. Afghanistan also has a new outlet to the sea, due to a 135-mile road constructed by India connecting the Iranian port of Chahbahar with Nimroz Province in Afghanistan. It is thus increasingly poised to resume its historic (and lucrative) position as the trading cross-roads of Central and South Asia.

The question for the U.S. is how a regional diplomatic agreement that would help address Pakistan's chronic security concerns at the same time as it would engage key regional players in underwriting long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan can also help build the foundations for regional economic engagement and integration. Reduced trade barriers and a growing common economic space in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan can radiate outward through a much broader Central and South Asian region. From Turkey to China, India to Russia, the EU to Singapore, many countries have a strong interest in the economic development of this region. And again, when it becomes clear that a serious diplomatic process is finally in train, many countries will have an incentive to be sure that they have a place at the table.

Before concluding this discussion of a desirable end-state in Afghanistan and how to get there, it is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on what this debate is *not* about. It is not about finger-pointing for past mistakes. It is not about the performance of our troops, which has often been superb. It is also not about whether their fight has been worth it. We have an overwhelming reason to ensure that Afghanistan cannot again offer sanctuary to Al Qaeda and the fighting to date has brought us to the point where Al Qaeda is severely degraded. It is not about whether COIN is right or wrong as a theory of how to fight insurgency. And it is not about whether Afghanistan can ever be governed.

It is about getting from where we are now to where we want to be. I have argued for a realistic vision of a secure, stable, and self-reliant Afghanistan. Achieving that goal requires seizing the opportunity and the political space afforded us by Osama Bin Laden's death to orchestrate and schedule negotiations on a final political settlement within Afghanistan and a broader regional

economic and security agreement. In the meantime, as the endgame begins, we must move as rapidly as possible to a posture of supporting only those Afghan forces and officials who demonstrably take responsibility for their own security and development. That was, after all, the central premise of how we distributed funds to European countries under the Marshall Plan.

In conclusion, success in Afghanistan is above all a matter of aligning incentives. Our military strategy must work side by side with a development strategy and a diplomatic strategy that focuses on building incentives for all the relevant players -- Afghan villagers and growing urban populations, Afghan troops, the Afghan government, the Pakistani government, the Afghan and possibly the Pakistani Taliban, India, China, Russia, Turkey, the EU and others – to act in ways that will advance their own interests and our ultimate goals. That is a job for our diplomats more than for our military and our development experts. It may seem like an impossible job, but the sooner we embark on it, the better the chances that we can get it done.