

USMC

Surge of American Forces in Afghanistan

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Introduction

Support for the global war on terrorism has begun to dissipate, and partner allies, such as Canada and Germany, have begun to entertain troop withdrawals as a result of their own internal domestic pressure. Recent efforts to stabilize the country of Afghanistan have come under intense international scrutiny as a result of oversight and miscalculation both strategically and operationally. In a recent interview General McKiernan, the head of U.S. forces in Afghanistan made this assertion:

There is no doubt that Afghanistan has not received the resources from the international community needed to meet its requirements for security, governance, or development. Militarily, we have never had enough forces to conduct a proper counterinsurgency campaign across Afghanistan. To do that-clear out insurgents, keep them separated from the population, and set the conditions for reconstruction and development-all of that translates to boots on the ground, we are short of them.¹

As Afghanistan again becomes the regional battlefield it was in the 1980s and 1990s, the need for an abrupt and accelerated effort to stabilize and build a viable Afghanistan is becoming time-sensitive. The cost of transferring forces, both figuratively and literally, from Iraq to Afghanistan over the course of the next few years may be greater than the benign neglect of a sensible Afghan government in the 90s. This will

¹ Peter Goodspeed, "We Are At A Critical Juncture," *National Post*, 4 October 2008, Sec A.

deliver similar effects on the international level. The U.S. should initiate an immediate surge of American forces in Afghanistan, ensure the rapid expansion of the Afghan security forces, and develop national infrastructure to guarantee long-term success.

The Current Situation

U.S. and other assessments of the effort to stabilize Afghanistan are increasingly negative to the extent that top U.S. commanders say they are not sure if the effort can be successful.² Global insecurity has risen following recent escalation in violence throughout Afghanistan, including areas not previously threatened. Moreover, the question of overall security has become an issue and popular support has begun to dissolve.

The Surge Concept

The most effective means to increase security and limit the loss of support would be a surge prior to spring 2009. Spring is the time of year when weather improves and historically, insurgent attacks increase. In the military sense, a surge can be thought of as a rapid influx of troop support employed in a

² U.S. Congressional Research Service. Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy (RL30588; Nov. 12, 2008), by Kenneth Katzman. Text in: LexisNexis Congressional Research Digital Collection; Accessed: December 10, 2008.

certain area to institute change. In both the case of Iraq and Afghanistan this change is security. Using the 2007 surge in Iraq as a model, the goal was clear:

The overall objective is establishing a "...unified, democratic federal Iraq that can govern itself, defend itself, and sustain itself, and is an ally in the War on Terror." The major element of the strategy was a change in focus for the US military "to help Iraqis clear and secure neighborhoods, to help them protect the local population, and to help ensure that the Iraqi forces left behind are capable of providing the security."³

Using the sectarian violence and security issues in Iraq during 2006 as an example, one can see how a surge following increased levels of violence over an extended period of time exhausts the patience of the supporting populace. It overextends the endurance of forces, thus the preponderance of effort must be committed up front to ensure that security is maintained in the long run without external support. For Afghanistan to operate autonomously within the near future, the "clear, hold, build" methodology of asymmetric combat must be executed simultaneously. Afghanistan's problems are unique, however; a rural based insurgency, weak central government, thriving narcotics trade, poorly developed infrastructure, and formidable terrain ensure that this conflict will continue for the foreseeable future. If a strong Afghan base is not built rapidly via a surge, the expense to the international community

³ Statement made to troops by US Ambassador to Iraq, February 14 2008.

and effects in the region will be felt over a very long period of time.

The idea of *immediate* appears as one looks at the foundation the coalition is creating for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). The strength of their base will determine if they are capable of operating autonomously. Focusing the effort on providing security so the Afghans can become self-sustaining in the future is paramount to long term success. For the foreseeable future the U.S. and coalition partners must ensure against outside threats to the stability of Afghanistan. A surge is critical to neutralize those threats and to increase the pace of forward progress.

Afghanistan Security

Capable Afghan National Security Forces are the means by which the U.S. and NATO will wind down their involvement in Afghanistan.⁴ Security forces in Afghanistan consist of the Afghan National Army (ANA), which totals about 68,000 soldiers, and the Afghan National Police, which has about 80,000 members.⁵ The plan for both the ANA and ANP is a substantial expansion of

⁴ U.S. Congressional Research Service. Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy (RL30588; Nov. 12, 2008), by Kenneth Katzman. Text in: LexisNexis Congressional Research Digital Collection; Accessed: December 10, 2008.

⁵ Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook," Updated 18 December 2008, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html> (18December 2008)

about 50,000 service members for each organization over the next five years. However, as these organizations grow, they become increasingly reliant on international assistance for logistical support, command and control, and motivation to progress. This assistance helps improve what has been a conglomeration of close knit tribal factions with no definitive leadership or structure.

As America, which assumes the majority of the funding for support to Afghanistan, and partner nations begin to implement the plan for expansion, they must understand that rapid execution is essential to long-term success. Creating a credible national force capable of combating the insurgency requires using external security to isolate and resolve problems. The U.S. and partner allies must provide security until national forces are strong enough to stand on their own. This must begin immediately.

Current ANSF

Seven years after the invasion of Afghanistan, neither the ANA nor ANP is capable of standing on their own.⁶ Most assessments of both the ANA and ANP identify problems of corruption, desertion, poor discipline, drug abuse, and dependency on coalition support to conduct simple missions.

⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, David Kasten, and Adam Mausner, *WINNING IN AFGHANISTAN: CREATING EFFECTIVE AFGHAN SECURITY FORCES* (CSIS, 2008), Page 2

Many of the problems are related to cultural mindsets that require a specific focus from Afghan leadership as well as time to change. A survival mentality, tribal-centric thought process, and lack of faith in a central government will not be influenced over night. However, to conduct operations as a credible force against the enemy, security must be provided by forces across a wider breadth of the country. This should be followed rapidly by an increase in security, stability, and support missions aimed at isolating the insurgent threat. The focus should be limiting distractions (attacks and internal scandal) by creating an environment that allows improvement of the country's existing organizations.

Furthermore, both the expansion and improvement of the ANP and ANA depend heavily on embedded augmentation by U.S. or coalition forces to support Afghan efforts to supply, equip, and train their own forces. In the case of education and training, a low embed-to-Afghan ratio is better. With the culture of Afghanistan being heavily tribal and decentralized, the focus on security at the district levels (versus provincial and national) will be critical and require a wider spread of both command and control and military assistance.

National Infrastructure

Directly related to the need for security is the need for infrastructure that can help the country stand alone and develop an identity. Following nearly thirty years of invasion and civil war, Afghanistan has come to rely solely on economic aid not only for reconstruction efforts, but also for national overhead to run on a day-to-day basis. Afghanistan has received hundreds of billions of dollars in foreign aid since 2001; however, this amount is often criticized by the Afghan government as failing to meet minimum requirements. Russian occupation of the 70s and 80s leveled much of the existing infrastructure and Taliban governance of the 90s held the country in a medieval-like state. Afghanistan has years to go before it can stand alone logistically. Although reconstruction efforts have been ongoing since early 2004, programs to increase the economic sovereignty of Afghanistan reveal significant shortfalls in basic measurements of social and economic stature.

For example, Afghanistan has a literacy rate of only 28%, which identifies the need for education opportunities to be expanded. Nearly 300,000 children could not attend school in the south during 2007 due to violence in surrounding areas. Afghanis have an unemployment rate of 40% that illustrates the need for workforce expansion. Increased employment could produce more than the \$715 million in revenues that was

generated in 2007 to cover over \$1.2 billion in expenditures. Although 85% of Afghanis have access to health coverage, the life expectancy remains at about 45 years of age. Only 15-20% of the country has access to electricity, which is available in most areas for only minimal periods of time during the day. Afghanistan's availability of arable farm land is roughly 12%; however, only five percent of that is in use because of the lack of availability of water.⁷ Poppy remains the chief export of the country, which produces over 90% of the world's heroin and generates an estimated \$100 million dollars a year for the Taliban insurgency.⁸

Combating the myriad of different deficiencies that prevent Afghanistan from moving forward will not occur without significant expansion of the programs and efforts already in place. Provisional reconstruction teams (PRT) exist to win the hearts and minds of the populace and expand the confidence in the central government. Combined with mobile training teams (MTT), whose sole purpose is to train indigenous forces in military and law enforcement techniques, both institutions have made valuable improvements in areas that are relatively secure. However, as a result of the resurgence of violence, progress of

⁷ Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook," Updated 18 December 2008, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html> (18December 2008)

⁸ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. Yale University Press, March 2001.

these agencies and other USAID programs has slowed. The need for additional security to augment these programs should be considered a priority.

Counter Argument

The main argument against a surge is the manner in which the Afghanistan conflict differs from the war in Iraq. Proponents of this idea say that the fight is no longer a battle for territory, economics, or secular beliefs. Pakistan and Afghanistan are fragile, multi-ethnic states. Ironically, by ignoring ethnic factors and defining the struggle with *ihadists* mainly in military terms, the United States has inadvertently helped Al Qaeda and the Taliban capture the leadership of Pashtun nationalism.⁹ The conflict now stretches beyond the borders into Pakistan where insurgents have a safe haven and can simply withdraw from conflict. These individuals argue that a surge would lead to only greater availability of coalition targets of opportunity, thus expanding overall violence and increasing casualties.

This argument carries some weight with regard to the assessment of the two conflicts. Iraq is more isolated diplomatically than Afghanistan due to its relationship with

⁹ Selig S. Harrison, "The Pashtun Time Bomb," *International Herald Tribune*, 1 August 2007, Sec A.

surrounding nations (Kuwait and Iran) and, thus, the conflict was generally maintained within the country's borders. Furthermore, the size and population of Iraq is much smaller than Afghanistan; the latter would require a potentially larger surge. The majority of forces committed during the surge would have to close the porous borders of Afghanistan and create a wider distribution of forces across a greater swath of country. They would have to isolate the conflict, filter the borders, and allow the trained Afghani forces the flexibility to control the interior of their country—a daunting task.

Conclusion

The escalation of violence in Afghanistan points heavily to the transition of regional conflict in the Middle East to a new battleground. As the stage for fighting rotates, what was a limited focus on Afghanistan begins to increase, and popular opinion and support are scrutinized. Simultaneously, the media creates a new set of criteria to judge the success or failure of strategic and operational military objectives. As a result, both international and domestic support have the potential to diminish should objectives not be given both a timeline and criteria for success. The gradual influx of soldiers over the next three to four years will give the opposition time to reposition the fight and begin exhausting patience for war. An

immediate surge that provides security and contributes to the progress of infrastructure development would deny the enemy the ground they need to conduct a war on. Furthermore, it will limit the attrition of coalition support through a drawn out campaign. The impact is a decisive victory for the coalition and a safe and stable Afghanistan.