



Passing the BATON

*Foreign Policy Challenges and
Opportunities Facing the New Administration*

Session Six: “The Way Forward in Afghanistan”

Speakers: **General David H. Petraeus**, United States Central Command;
Ashraf Ghani, Chairman, Institute for State Effectiveness;
Francesc Vendrell, Special Representative for Afghanistan, European Union;
Congressman Tom Perriello, D-VA;
J. Alexander Their, Senior Advisor, Rule of Law, United States Institute of Peace

Main Issues

The stabilization of Afghanistan is a top foreign policy and national security priority of the United States. Extremist elements in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to pose a direct threat to US and international security more than seven years after 9/11 and the ensuing American invasion of Afghanistan. The U.S. and its international partners have been engaged in establishing a stable, legitimate Afghan government that adheres to the rule of law and fulfills its basic international obligations as the long-term solution to combating militancy. Yet in the last three years there has been a serious deterioration in security, a failure to meet basic development goals, and a corresponding loss of popular confidence in the Afghan government and the international coalition.

An increasingly unstable and violent Pakistan has raised the specter of even greater regional instability, including possible confrontation between nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan. This panel explored what critical steps must be taken in the areas of security, governance, rule of law, political reconciliation, and development to put Afghanistan back on the path to peace and stability.

Use of Force

In 2001, Afghans enthusiastically welcomed international security forces into their country. Today, the failure of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) to create a secure and stable environment has led to a lack of confidence and questioning of the utility of international troops by the Afghan population. This conflict cannot be solved by a military solution alone, although the current situation requires more coalition and Afghan security forces on the ground to quell violence and train and support Afghan security forces. Civilian casualties, a lightning-rod issue that increases anti-American sentiment and serves as a recruiting tool for insurgents, must be minimized.

Establishing the Rule of Law



Passing the BATON

*Foreign Policy Challenges and
Opportunities Facing the New Administration*

U.S. counterinsurgency efforts must make the population the center of gravity for the mission, focusing much more on state building and rule of law. Afghanistan is highly decentralized, and much capacity resides at the local level, so efforts must also be at the village, district, municipality, and provincial levels. Local governance structures and community and civil society organizations should be empowered. The Afghan government and international community must address corruption and impunity by improving accountability measures and supporting efforts to remove bad actors from positions of power.

2009 Elections

The upcoming presidential and provincial council elections in 2009 are an opportunity for a renewed contract between the Afghan people and the government. These elections must be free and fair, as elections that are viewed as illegitimate will further destabilize the country. A legitimate vetting process is needed to remove corrupt actors or the Afghan population will lose faith in the democratic process.

Afghanistan is not Iraq

It is important to learn lessons for Afghanistan from Iraq (and other contexts), but every case is unique and requires a carefully calibrated approach based on local understanding and leadership. There are vast differences between Afghanistan and Iraq with regard to topography, weather, infrastructure, literacy, natural resources, experience with centralized government, and ethnic and tribal structures.

A Regional Approach

To succeed in Afghanistan, the U.S. must address regional challenges. Much of the Afghan insurgency is based in Pakistan, which is facing its own internal security challenges. It is essential to involve Pakistan, Iran, India, the Central Asian states and other regional actors to address each state's security concerns. Afghanistan currently produces more than 90 percent of the world's opium, which funds insurgents and criminal networks throughout the region while also creating a public health catastrophe in Iran and Pakistan. Trade, border security, economic, and agricultural policies must all be multilateralized and tailored to address this situation. Iran played a helpful role in Afghanistan in 2001-2002 and has legitimate interests in Afghanistan. Counter-narcotics cooperation may be the first step in broader US-Iran cooperation.

Role of the International Community

The U.S. effort in Afghanistan requires a comprehensive and coordinated international strategy and must include both near and long-term strategies. The international community should be a catalyst for development, and should not assume the role of providing public services. The



Passing the BATON

*Foreign Policy Challenges and
Opportunities Facing the New Administration*

American transition to the Obama administration may increase European willingness to contribute more to the mission in Afghanistan, however, the longer the war goes on, the more unwilling EU countries will be to send troops to Afghanistan.

Policy Conclusions*

1. Success in Afghanistan will not be through military power alone, and a sustained and coordinated international approach is essential.
2. Afghanistan needs a tailored strategy – one that includes increased Afghan leadership and capacity in all aspects of the mission.
3. The international coalition should focus on governance and the rule of law at the local and national levels in order to regain legitimacy. Radical measures to end corruption and the embedded culture of impunity are also necessary.
4. Upcoming elections must be perceived as free and fair. Together with the Afghans, we must ensure a legitimate outcome and sideline bad actors that tarnish the face of the government to an increasingly skeptical population.
5. A regional strategy that includes Pakistan, India, the Central Asian states, and even China, Russia and Iran is essential in order to stabilize Afghanistan.
6. The international community must recommit to investing in Afghanistan and the region for the long-term.

* Policy Conclusions from Group Panel Discussions at Passing the Baton 2009 were not necessarily achieved by group consensus. In some instances, individual panel members may have been in disagreement with the larger group. For specific information on each panel's contents, please see the comprehensive online archive at www.usip.org/baton2009.