



BACKGROUND

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Renewing Our Commitment to Afghanistan: Congress' Role Beyond the Spring Offensive

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The future of Afghanistan is at risk. Both the Taliban and NATO have launched spring offensives. President Bush has called for an extra brigade and requested \$11.8 billion in aid over two years. Unless the United States renews both its commitment and its competence, the gains of the last five years could be lost. To shore up the mission, Congress should focus on:

- Train and Equip: Provide resources and oversight to train and equip Afghan security forces
- No Sanctuary: Pressure Pakistan and provide resources to eliminate the Taliban's sanctuary
- Reach Afghans: Retool aid and counter-narcotics to reach more Afghans directly
- Build Capacity: Develop U.S. capabilities needed to sustain success in Afghanistan
- Sustain Support: Make it clear that the U.S. is in for the long haul in Afghanistan

The Situation

Because we went into Afghanistan with broad international support and strong Afghan partners, Afghanistan has been, to date, a relative success story. The Taliban is out of power. Al Qaeda lost a sanctuary. A U.N.-backed process helped Afghans pass a Constitution and elect a new government. Our allies in NATO are engaged in the largest NATO operation ever outside Europe, with over 35 nations contributing over 36,000 troops. Foreign

aid has built schools, health care facilities, 1,800 miles of roads, and contributed to economic growth. Afghans enjoy freedoms they have not had in three decades of fighting.

But these gains have come under direct threat from a resurgent Taliban drawing on tactics from Iraq. From 2005 to 2006, suicide bombings increased by more than 400% to 139 incidents, killing 2,000.

Remotely detonated bombings doubled to 1,677. Armed attacks tripled to 4,542. The U.S. military warned that the Taliban was "growing in influence in the south." The Taliban maintains its command structure, including its leader - Mullah Omar. The Taliban also benefits from a sanctuary in Pakistan that allows insurgents the freedom to pursue a hit and run strategy: strike in Afghanistan, then retreat across the border to regroup.

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The security response has been uneven. The U.S. lacks the forces to do the job alone. NATO is hindered by burdensome rules of engagement. Afghan security forces are not yet prepared: according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Afghan Army claims 30,100 operational soldiers and the police 49,700 officers, "yet after taking into account desertion, ghost names, and the incompetence of many, the total is more likely to be half the number, if that." Germany's police-training effort was undermanned, and a State and Pentagon inspector general report found that despite a \$1.1 billion U.S. police training program, we cannot track personnel and equipment, do not adequately train police in the field, and may have outsourced too much of the job to DynCorp, a private contractor.

¹ The U.S. has 12,000 troops under NATO command out of roughly 27,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan



Meanwhile, Afghans are frustrated with rampant corruption, slow reconstruction, and persistent unemployment. In many places, you can make more money working for the Taliban, or a local militia, than the police. Narcotics account for roughly \$3 billion, a third of the economy, and the U.N. forecasts an increase in poppy cultivation in 2007. This funds the Taliban, encourages criminality, and retards legitimate economic growth. For rural Afghans - 80 percent of whom live in poverty - poppies can offer the best way to make a living.

What To Do

Afghanistan presents a new kind of challenge: the need to rebuild a failed state in order to counter radical jihadists. Our military is fighting similar battles for hearts, minds, and the removal of terrorist sanctuary from Southeast Asia to the horn of Africa. But our military alone cannot win this war. Cold War institutions are not designed for this struggle: America needs new capabilities integrated across agencies. Our political leaders need vision to change our institutions to meet the needs we now face, and they cannot expect quick victories. We dislodged al-Qaeda, but due to our shifted focus in Iraq, we did not destroy them - we need success in Afghanistan to prevent future training grounds. Yet to quote General Barry McCaffrey, Afghanistan, "has been shamefully under-resourced...in terms of inter-agency involvement, US combat forces, political will, and nation-building resources." Reversing this trend will demand both a spike in resources and a retooled strategy.

1. Give Afghans the Capacity to Win: Stepped up combat efforts are needed to beat back the Taliban. But training cannot be short-changed or overlooked. To make the Afghan Army a viable force, the U.S. needs a long-term effort to provide equipment and logistical support. To bolster security and the legitimacy of the Afghan state, the U.S. has to ramp up police training by substantially increasing police trainers; offering incentives to deploy highly qualified U.S. trainers; extending training for Afghan police in the field; increasing joint patrols between U.S. forces and Afghan police; and helping Afghans increase compensation and vet officers. Because our national security is at stake, we should reconsider whether outside contractors have the capabilities and oversight mechanisms to do the job right.

2. Get Tough with Pakistan - and Improve Development in the Border Region - to Deny Sanctuary to Terrorists: In return for over \$10 billion in American aid already sent since 9/11, Pakistan should be held accountable for its effort to crack down on the Taliban, and for the activities of its intelligence service. In the short term, that means getting tough with Musharraf. In the long term, it requires us to help Pakistan develop the border region, which is more a network of Pashtun tribes than a division of two nation-states. There is no quick fix. This is one of the most undeveloped regions on earth. But aid efforts will make clear that we are not ceding the hearts and minds of Pashtuns to the Taliban, lay the groundwork for a future of opportunity, and send a message to Pakistan that we are doing our part - now they must do theirs.

3. Improve Aid Delivery: Congress should ask for a single point of coordination for aid in Washington and Afghanistan. Quick-impact projects like roads are necessary, but they must be buttressed by capacity building and anti-corruption measures, so Afghans can sustain rebuilding for themselves. In general, we need an approach that is less "inside-out." The country cannot be turned around from Kabul alone. We need to develop better relationships with provincial governments and Congress should ask that more than half our aid get delivered locally, to regions. The \$500 million allotted for 2007 to eradicate poppy crops - which angers and alienates Afghans - should be redirected to a comprehensive program that develops alternate livelihoods, purchases poppy crops, and interdicts narcotics in transit.

4. Build America's Capacity to Fight a New Kind of Battle: Our experience in Afghanistan has taught us a thing or two about what we need to succeed in that country and beyond: more Special Forces; improved capabilities to train foreign armies and police; and more trained U.S. civilians who can function in conflict zones. Other American capabilities must be buttressed, including language and cultural skills; human intelligence networks; and better inter-agency coordination.

5. Commit For the Long Haul. Finally, we must make it clear to both our friends and our enemies that we are in Afghanistan for the duration. Many Afghans are uncertain about the future of their



country. They do not know who is going to win - the Karzai government, the Taliban, or their local strongman. They have seen the U.S. walk away from Afghanistan before, when we steadily disengaged after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. We are still paying a heavy price for that disengagement, just as we are paying a price for our diversion of resources to Iraq.

Congress can help us win this crucial war by conveying a steady, bipartisan commitment to both Americans and Afghans. Since the fall of the Taliban, 3 million Afghan refugees have returned to their country - a stark contrast to the reverse trend in Iraq. Many are highly able and want our help in building a more hopeful future. Progressives must stand with those Afghans, because it is in our national interest to deny the return of terrorism and extremism, and because it is in our moral interest to help them achieve a life free from fear.

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