



Swords and Ploughshares

Sustainable Security in Afghanistan Requires Sweeping
U.S. Policy Overhaul

Reuben E. Brigety II March 2009



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Contents

1 Open letter to President Obama

3 Executive summary

4 Major results

5 Introduction

6 Problem and hypothesis

8 Methodology

8 Scenario design

9 Scenario products

10 Scenario conduct

11 Methodology for cataloging observations

11 Limitations

12 Observations from the three simulation rounds

12 Round I–A: Washington strategic planning using existing foreign assistance tools

13 Round I–B: Operational planning in Kabul with existing foreign assistance tools

14 Rounds II–A and B: Strategic and operational planning in Washington and Kabul with slightly enhanced foreign assistance tools

15 Round III–A: Strategic planning in Washington with enhanced foreign assistance tools developed by CAP’s Sustainable Security Program

17 Round III–B: Operational planning in Kabul with enhanced foreign assistance tools developed by CAP’s Sustainable Security Program

19 The hot wash

20 Development professionals

21 Development and counterinsurgency

21 Transformational tools

21 Catalytic development

22 Analysis of the simulation

24 Recommendations and conclusion

27 Acknowledgements

Open letter to President Obama

March 19, 2009

Nearing its eighth year, the war in Afghanistan is one of the most pressing foreign policy challenges of the Obama administration. The intersection of hostile insurgents, a weak national government, a booming opium poppy trade, and an unstable neighbor in Pakistan means the crisis in Afghanistan defies solution through military means alone. There are many studies available on the best military approaches to take in this conflict, but there have been comparatively few efforts to examine how the United States and its allies should best use its foreign assistance resources to achieve success.

Afghanistan, of course, is but one of a series of complex challenges facing the United States. From Iraq to Sudan and Haiti to North Korea, the United States must rethink how it employs all instruments of its national power—including defense, diplomacy, and development—to achieve our national security objectives around the world. The Sustainable Security Program at the Center for American Progress has issued a series of reports offering details on how U.S. national security policy would benefit from an expanded implementation of development assistance and the related tools to utilize these capabilities. A list of our work is displayed on the opposite page.

As part of its work in this area, the Center decided to examine the current situation in Afghanistan. In partnership with the Institute for State Effectiveness, CAP developed an innovative scenario exercise to test how much “bang for the buck” the U.S. government could achieve in stabilization and reconstruction operations if it undertook many of the foreign assistance reforms advocated in previous CAP reports. If the application of a Sustainable Security model proved to be effective in Afghanistan, then it might be usefully applied in other areas of concern as well.

The exercise invited a series of leading Afghanistan and foreign assistance experts to spend three days at the Airlie Center in Warrenton, Virginia. Under the guidance of expert facilitators from the ISE and the Maxwell School of Syracuse University, participants recreated the strategic planning process in Washington and the operational planning process in Kabul. The foreign assistance tools available to them were made increasingly robust over time, and the decision making of the group was examined to determine how the improvement in foreign assistance mechanisms affected the quality of strategic and operational plans that were developed. The results of the exercise are included in the enclosed technical study, “Swords and Ploughshares: Sustainable Security in Afghanistan Requires Sweeping U.S. Policy Overhaul.”

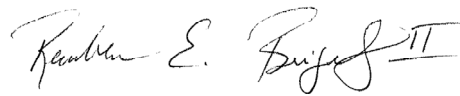
Over the course of three days, we learned the following essential lesson:

If the United States is to be effective conducting stabilization and reconstruction operations in fragile states such as Afghanistan and beyond, then robust foreign assistance reform is urgently required.

Despite the selfless dedication of America's brave fighting forces, the war in Afghanistan cannot be won through military means alone. It is essential to bring all instruments of national power—including elements of defense, diplomacy, and development—to bear on the problem. Yet America's development assistance mechanisms in their current configuration are not up to the challenge. That is why robust reforms should be seen as a key national security priority.

We hope this report sheds light both on the path forward in Afghanistan and on the importance of enabling a sustainable security approach to U.S. foreign policy. The moment has never been more urgent to address them both.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Reuben E. Brigety II". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Reuben" and last name "Brigety" being more legible than the middle initial "E." and the suffix "II".

Reuben E. Brigety II, Ph.D.
Director
Sustainable Security Program,
Center for American Progress

Executive summary

The breadth and complexity of the security challenges facing the United States abroad often defy solution through the application of military force alone. The Sustainable Security Program at the Center for American Progress over the past year generated a series of analyses to examine alternative approaches to conventional notions of national security—alongside policy recommendations to strengthen the non-military tools of U.S. power. All of this work is based on the premise that the United States can best promote its security interests abroad by supporting the essential needs of citizens around the world, especially in poor and unstable countries.

Yet the ability of the U.S. government to improve the lives of others in countries with varying degrees of instability does not match its ability to wage decisive combat operations. There is a fundamental mismatch between the civilian and military aspects of American power—a mismatch that undermines the pursuit of U.S. foreign policy, particularly the effective implementation of foreign assistance programs across the spectrum of conflict. This must be corrected to achieve near-term successes in immediate crises facing the United States, such as in Afghanistan today, as well as to ensure the long-term viability of U.S. foreign policy objectives abroad.

With the assistance of the Institute for State Effectiveness, the Center for American Progress sponsored a simulation exercise to assess the impact of various foreign assistance reforms on the ability of the U.S. government to stabilize countries in crisis, choosing Afghanistan as the crucible because of the immediate need for the United States to confront the crisis now confronting policymakers there. Approximately 20 experts with significant experience in development assistance around the world and in Afghanistan were invited to participate. The exercise was designed to test the hypothesis that reforming key aspects of America's foreign assistance architecture would significantly improve the government's ability to foster a stable environment in Afghanistan.

Going into the exercise, we presumed that if this specific conclusion proved correct in Afghanistan, then we could reasonably infer that such improvements might help the U.S. government to perform stabilization missions effectively in other conflict environments as well. Coming out of the three-day simulation exercise at the Airlie Center in Warrenton, Virginia, we realized that our original premise—that robust foreign assistance reforms outlined in our Sustainable Security analyses (see Page 2 for details) would secure U.S.

foreign policy objectives abroad—was not sufficient to bring about success in Afghanistan. In fact, even more sweeping reforms were required to stabilize and then turn around the security situation in Afghanistan.

Major results

The results of the exercise yielded five major conclusions for foreign assistance reform generally and for U.S. policy toward Afghanistan in particular:

- **Integrated planning and programming in Washington and abroad is essential.** U.S. foreign assistance mechanisms must be flexible and robust enough to have an immediate and enduring strategic impact abroad.
- **Counterinsurgency and development strategies must be intertwined.** U.S. development assistance must be focused first in the most militarily secure areas of the country to build momentum and demonstrate success to other areas of the country still struggling with basic security problems.
- **Catalytic development of local development assistance capabilities is paramount.** U.S. policies must build local capacity and demonstrable domestic solutions rather than building dependence on external support from abroad.
- **Development professionals matter.** Hire enough development professionals to put them everywhere they are needed.
- **“Maximalist” measures are insufficient.** Strengthening foreign assistance will require more reform than we thought.

In the pages that follow, the simulation exercises conducted over three days will be detailed alongside the conclusions drawn from them. A complete breakdown of the simulation model employed in the exercise and the list of participants and their roles in the exercise over the course of those three days is available online at the Sustainable Security page on the Center for American Progress Web site. Together, this report demonstrates that success in Afghanistan (and by inference success in other unstable trouble spots abroad) will require the Obama administration to retool its foreign assistance programs quickly and efficiently in the coming months and years. U.S. national security and foreign policy objectives will be much better served because of the effort.

Introduction

In recent years, two separate but related debates have garnered significant attention among U.S. foreign policy and development experts. The first is the need to reform the U.S. foreign assistance structure. The second encompasses the search for stability in Afghanistan.

The Sustainable Security Program at the Center for American Progress believes that the attainment of U.S. objectives in Afghanistan depends, in large measure, on improving the socio-economic circumstances of Afghan civilians through the provision of basic government services and the growth of an economy grounded in legitimate activities—not the cultivation of poppy seeds for the production of opium, which is far and away Afghanistan’s principle money crop. Markedly improving the daily lives of the majority of Afghans would provide their central government with greater legitimacy in the eyes of the population, undermine popular support for the Taliban insurgency, and provide alternate activities for many young men who are now engaging in armed conflict.

Regrettably, the mechanisms of the U.S. government to facilitate socioeconomic development worldwide are under considerable strain, not least in Afghanistan. Congressional earmarks limit program innovation on the ground. The dearth of qualified development professionals in the required numbers within the U.S. government often inhibits the effective monitoring, implementation, and reach of key foreign assistance projects. And perhaps worst of all, development activities performed by various U.S. government agencies are not formally coordinated via a coherent strategy.

While these and other shortcomings affect U.S. foreign assistance programs around the world, they have proven to be acutely problematic in Afghanistan. The absence of robust and effective foreign aid mechanisms often prevents the U.S. military from consolidating and capitalizing on its combat gains in the country. Furthermore, many of the problems with the foreign assistance program in Afghanistan manifest themselves in other countries, to greater or lesser degrees and across the spectrum of conflict.

Recognition of the failures of U.S. foreign assistance programs and strategies has led many development advocates to lobby for sweeping reform of our foreign aid system. Similarly, national security experts concerned about the stability of Afghanistan are increasingly calling for the improvement and strengthening of civilian development capabilities to complement the military efforts of the U.S. military and our allies in Afghanistan.

The Center for American Progress is one of the few organizations active in both debates, arguing for the reform of U.S. foreign assistance mechanisms generally, and for increased development efforts in Afghanistan in particular in order to help out military forces achieve lasting success. This dual approach is consistent with the central premise of our Sustainable Security Program—ensuring the security of the United States and our national interests abroad depends in large measure on supporting the essential needs of individuals around the world, especially in the most poor and unstable countries. The Center has produced a number of studies to advance the theoretical components of the sustainable security model and to derive specific policy proposals from them, but we continue to look for ways to apply these concepts to pressing foreign policy challenges.

With the United States engaged in two major wars and confronting the challenges of numerous fragile states from Haiti to Yemen—all of which defy solution through the use of conventional military force alone—never has the need been greater for proactive reforms to promote and protect U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives simultaneously. To demonstrate the importance of these reforms and to test their efficacy, the Center’s Sustainable Security Program developed a simulation exercise of our foreign assistance reform proposals, using Afghanistan as a case study. Partnering with the Institute for State Effectiveness, we invited the participation of leading experts in Afghanistan as well as development assistance to engage in a rigorous simulation exercise to learn how effective our proposed foreign assistance reforms might be in practice and what the implications might be for U.S. policy in Afghanistan.

To understand the rigor of the exercise requires a brief review of the problems we set for ourselves and the other participants in the simulation exercise, as well as the methodology used and the scenario in which the simulation was conducted. We now turn to each of these building blocks of the exercise.

Problem and hypothesis

The principal issue under consideration is the efficacy of CAP’s proposals to improve U.S. foreign assistance. In particular, the recommendations included the:

- Existence and promulgation of a National Development Strategy
- Existence of a Cabinet-level development agency with consolidated responsibility for all non-military foreign aid programs of the U.S. government
- Existence of legal authority to deliver foreign assistance worldwide and without “Buy American” purchase requirements at the discretion of the president
- Increase of professional development staff, allowing the assignment of civilian development advisors to military units down to battalion level
- Designation of the U.S. Agency for International Development mission director as senior development officer in country and senior development advisor to U.S. ambassador.

Extensive research and analysis led CAP to conclude these are vital reforms, but there had been no empirical study to validate their utility in the field. Consequently, for our simulation exercise we framed the problem to test the efficacy of our reform proposals in the following way:

Would the adoption of the Sustainable Security recommendations for reforming foreign assistance substantially improve the ability of the U.S. government to facilitate the emergence of a stable environment in a country coping with state fragility or outright state failure?

The analysis that led to CAP's recommendations suggest that each of our proposed reforms, for different reasons, would be critical for making U.S. foreign assistance more effective, particularly in unstable environments. The basis for CAP's recommendations included both theoretical and pragmatic considerations and analysis. On the theoretical side, sustainable security takes a more holistic approach toward security. National security—the safety of the United States—must be coupled with human security, the well-being and safety of people, and collective security, or shared interests of many countries. This approach is related to the so-called “3D” concept that calls for the integration of defense, diplomacy, and development efforts throughout the globe.

Pragmatic considerations, of course, require that we test our analysis of the best way to operationalize and implement sustainable security based on the multiple agencies and actors involved in the defense, diplomacy, and development sectors. First and foremost, sustainable security calls for stronger leadership at the highest levels. CAP also recommends a robust strategy for coordination. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed to test the efficacy of our proposals:

The adoption of our Sustainable Security recommendations for reforming foreign assistance will generally improve the ability of the U.S. government to strengthen its strategic and operational planning capabilities for stabilizing a country, particularly in Afghanistan.

An Afghan elderly man is seen destroying the opium poppies on the field during a poppy eradication campaign in Nangarhar province, east of Kabul. Afghanistan depends on the growth of an economy grounded in legitimate activities—not the cultivation of poppy seeds for the production of opium, which is far and away Afghanistan's principle money crop.



AP PHOTO/REHMAN GUL

Methodology

To test this hypothesis, CAP decided to host a three-day simulation exercise in which its foreign assistance reform proposals would be applied to a real-world scenario to determine their impact on strategic and operational planning processes for stabilizing countries in crisis. The initial step in developing the methodology was to choose the country in which the reform proposals would be tested. CAP chose Afghanistan for several reasons. First, it is a country with profound development challenges that also are related to its immediate security. Second, the United States has substantial geopolitical interests at stake there. Third (and as a result of the second reason), the United States has already committed billions of dollars of development assistance to Afghanistan, with at best mixed results on its stability to date.

Scenario design

The basic concept of the scenario design was to change the foreign assistance tools available to the U.S. government while maintaining the context in which they were applying those tools in Afghanistan relatively constant. Using this approach, it should be possible to determine how changes in the foreign assistance mechanisms might affect the ability of the government to develop strategic and operational plans to stabilize Afghanistan.

To this end, the simulation was conducted in three rounds, with each round having two parts. Part A of each round would take place in Washington, during which participants would be asked to craft a broad strategic plan to stabilize Afghanistan and provide strategic guidance to the field for the achievement of these objectives. Part B of each round would take place in Kabul, during which participants would be asked to design operational plans to implement the strategy developed in Washington.

In each of the three successive rounds, participants were given increasingly robust sets of foreign assistance tools available to them both in Washington and in Kabul. In Round I, participants were tasked with developing strategic plans (Part A) and then operational plans (Part B), using the set of tools currently available today. In Round II, participants were given slightly improved tools, specifically an increase in development capabilities and authorities available to them.

For instance, the White House Senior Director/Afghanistan czar started in Round I with a role to “facilitate strategic coordination among all departments for monitoring development and formulation of new strategic initiatives,” but in Round II the role shifted to Deputy National Security Adviser for Development, “a new post created by the Obama administration in an effort to improve cooperation between security and development agencies and initiatives.” As we will explain in the analysis that follows, the participants in the simulation decided that the scenario outlined for Round II in fact inhibited their ability to test the efficacy of the development assistance tools assigned to them, prompting them to move directly to Round III.

In Round III, participants were given all of the tools proposed by the Sustainable Security Program—a national development strategy implemented by a new Cabinet-level development agency staffed by an increased number of experienced development professionals in Washington and Kabul, the latter of which were led by an empowered U.S. AID mission director reporting directly to the U.S. ambassador in Afghanistan. Thus, these constant (Round I), incremental (Round II), and comprehensive (Round III) reforms would be applied in Afghanistan to test their effects on the strategic and operational planning ability of the U.S. government to foster a stable environment.

Scenario products

Having chosen Afghanistan as the appropriate context and decided on the basic project design, CAP partnered with the Institute for State Effectiveness to write the scenario. Led by Dr. Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart, both internationally recognized experts on Afghanistan, ISE staff produced an experimental framework for evaluating the proposed hypothesis (see Appendix I on our Sustainable Security page of the Center’s Web site).

Once the scenario design was completed, the process of writing the scenario products began. CAP invited individuals to take part in the exercise, seeking recognized experts in their fields who had sufficient knowledge of the role they were to play and the institutions they were to represent in order to make the conduct of the scenario credible. Furthermore, each individual was assigned two roles to play during the simulation—one Washington-based and one Afghanistan-based. They were given the individualized instructions for each of these roles ahead of time, and each set of instructions had separate requirements for Rounds I, II, and III as the foreign assistance tools were changed.

Finally, a small number of experts were invited as observers. They did not participate directly in the exercise, but rather observed the simulation in its entirety and then shared their insights at the end. The complete list of invited experts who attended the simulation is available in Appendix II on the CAP Web site.



CAP/COLIN COOKMAN

Participants in the simulation exercise consider the outcome of one of the scenarios.

Scenario conduct

The exercise took place at the Airlie Center in Warrenton, Virginia, on January 22-23, with a dinner opening the exercise on the evening of January 21 during which participants were briefed on the conduct of the scenario, and with a closing session on January 24 to assess the outcomes of the simulation. During the two-day simulation, participants gathered in conference rooms representing “Washington” and “Kabul.” Their deliberations to craft strategic and operational plans were lightly guided by Dr. Ashraf Ghani of the ISE, who acted as the facilitator for the duration of the exercise.

All of the deliberations were observed remotely via digital Internet link by a “Control Cell” of CAP and ISE staff to record and evaluate the proceedings in real time. Note takers also were present in the conference room to take minutes of deliberations. Finally, the exercise ended with a so-called “hot wash” on the final day of the exercise, during which participants, observers, and staff would share their insights from the exercise and glean lessons learned. See Appendix III for the simulation schedule on our Web site.

Methodology for cataloging observations

Because the simulation was based on meetings in “Washington” and “Kabul” and discussion was the main way participants reached their conclusions, note takers were in the conference rooms to take minutes identifying the speaker and their main points. A digital recorder captured the entire simulation exercise. Additionally, Skype video was set up so that participants in the “control room” could listen to the conversation and observe participants remotely.

In most sessions, participants had to come up with strategy documents in Washington and operational plans in Kabul that distilled the main arguments, recommendations, and next steps from each session. All of these methods informed the conclusions and recommendations contained within the report. Analysis of the simulation’s outcomes was based on reviewing the recordings and notes taken during each session.

Limitations

There were some basic limitations inherent in the execution of the exercise. The most important of these was the availability of the participants. Not everyone was available to stay for the entire duration of the exercise. This is understandable given the time commitment involved and the external obligations of the participants. It was not anticipated that this would significantly alter the results of the exercise, and assignments to roles were made in such a way that every role would be played by a qualified individual in each of the rounds even when the schedules of some participants required them to be absent from the exercise.

The second limitation was time. Even though two full days of deliberations was a significant commitment of time, the simulation might have benefited by spending at least a full day on each of the rounds. This was not possible under time allotted. Therefore, the project designers decided to spend a full day on Round I, and split Rounds II and III on a single day, with the “hot wash” analysis completed on the third day.

Observations from the three simulation rounds

Round I–A: Washington strategic planning using existing foreign assistant tools

Framing the problem

There was considerable discussion about what the objectives guiding U.S. policy toward Afghanistan should be. Proposals ranged from merely focusing on preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorists to ensuring that Afghanistan is a stable, thriving democracy with governance that provides essential services to its entire people. By the end of round I-A, the group decided on the following U.S. strategic objective for Afghanistan: to facilitate the creation of a “stable democracy with effective governance that supports the essential needs of the people of Afghanistan and deny sanctuary to terrorism and insurgency.”

Early in the discussion, it was clear that regardless of the scope of the U.S. strategic objective, achieving security would be the linchpin for achieving it. This led to consideration of what constitutes security in the Afghanistan context, what the impediments are to achieving it, and how the United States might support improving it. Further, all of these were related to a broader focus on counterinsurgency strategy.

Development strategies

Development strategies were raised repeatedly in Round I-A and became a major component of the mission statement created by the group. Nevertheless, economic and social development was listed as the fifth of five priorities of the strategic plan, preceded by:

- The need for a political breakthrough
- Adopting a regional approach for all issues
- Advancing security
- Strengthening governance and the rule of law

Economic and social development placed fifth in priority because of the view that development programs could not be successful unless the other four priorities, especially security, were either achieved or well underway. Indeed, this fifth priority had 11 separate actions nested within it, most of which were either relatively vague (build on support for social development and infrastructure), massive (complete land reform program) or insufficiently explained (achieve integrated coordination of all foreign and Afghan development efforts).

Round I–B: Operational planning in Kabul with existing foreign assistance tools

Framing the problem

Participants in this round focused on writing an operational plan for Afghanistan. Three issues drove their deliberations. Specifically:

- What “worked” previously in U.S. operational approaches to Afghanistan policy
- What objectives can be feasibly accomplished in 2009
- What the constraints are to accomplishing U.S. objectives

Security considerations were discussed, but they did not dominate the agenda at the operational level to the same extent as they did in the strategic level in Washington. Instead, the group considered a wide array of issues that were related to improving the stability of Afghanistan that would require instruments other than the application of military power. Specifically, the need to:

- Develop integrated planning and execution of projects within the U.S. government
- Support the government capacity-building programs of the Afghan central government and rule of law in the country
- Support near-term economic development activities

In short, integrated planning and execution emerged as a key constraint on the effectiveness of U.S. programming in the past and on the potential success of U.S. programs in the future.

The need to build the capacity of the Afghan government and strengthen the rule of law was especially clear with regard to the Afghan National Police. The evidence that the ANP will remain a major driver of corruption and source of instability without professionalization and sustained resourcing was clear to the participants. Furthermore, it was evident that the successful holding of national elections in the autumn of 2009—a major strategic and operational objective—would not be possible without an effective national police force. Given the central importance of holding legitimate elections, immediate reform of the ANP was seen as a major priority.

Development operational priorities

Improving rural economic development by focusing on agriculture emerged as a key theme, as it was among the options that appeared to have the greatest prospects for near-term success. In addition, providing alternative livelihoods for farmers was seen as essential for stopping poppy cultivation and the accompanying profits that flow to insurgent groups from the international opium and heroin trade. Among the mechanisms needed to improve agricultural output were reliable lines of credit that could be made available to small farmers to purchase the materials necessary to plant crops for the next harvest.

Providing disaffected young men with access to university and vocational education also was identified as a key objective for development programs in 2009. It was closely associated with security considerations since unemployed young men are targets for recruitment into the Taliban.

To implement U.S. development programs effectively, the I-B group noted the central importance of improving U.S. government contracting mechanisms to increase the accountability, efficiency, and impact of contracting work in the country. In addition, the group concluded that it was vital to ensure that a greater proportion of contractor funding went to Afghan contractors, thereby creating jobs and boosting the capability of the private sector. Hiring more local contractors also would ensure that the infrastructure built was appropriately designed for local conditions and linked to appropriate provisions for ongoing operations and maintenance.

Finally, participants noted that there simply were not enough U.S. development professionals in the country to supervise contractors, mentor Afghan governmental officials, or coordinate planning with the military. On this last point, the group agreed that it was important to integrate planning for economic development programs with U.S. military priorities, particularly with regard to counterinsurgency objectives.

Rounds II-A and B: Strategic and operational planning in Washington and Kabul with slightly enhanced foreign assistance tools

Changes in methodology

Based on the results of Round I, the directors of the exercise decided to make two critical changes in the succeeding rounds. First, they decided to proceed directly to Round III, bypassing Round II. Given the progress made by the group during the first round, the directors felt that little would be gained by incrementally changing the development tools available to the players. Instead, they decided to go directly to the maximalist tools represented in Round III and give the participants additional time to work through the assigned problem with those enhanced mechanisms available.

Second, they decided to direct the group early in its Round III deliberations to assume the presence of a modicum of security in Afghanistan so that they would focus more on development issues. During Round I, the group focused so much on security that the directors felt not enough attention was being paid to development issues. Given the limited time available to consider a vast array of issues, it was decided that the arbitrary assumption of a degree of security in Round III would enable us to learn more about the utilization of improved development mechanisms.

In addition to these deliberate changes, there also were changes in participation. As noted earlier, some participants had to leave after the first day of the simulation, and others could arrive only on the second day. This resulted in the addition of two senior U.S. AID officials who brought with them decades of practical experience in development programming around the world as well as working within the interagency community in Washington and elsewhere. Another additional participant had worked for several years for the U.S. Treasury Department both in Washington and in Iraq on the financial aspects of reconstruction and stabilization issues.

Round III-A: Strategic planning in Washington with enhanced foreign assistance tools developed by CAP's Sustainable Security Program

Framing the problem

In this round, participants focused on developing a strategic plan for Afghanistan from the Washington perspective. The addition of seasoned development professionals from U.S. AID and an official from the U.S. Department of the Treasury significantly shifted the content of the conversation from the previous day. They offered much greater institutional knowledge about the utility of development assistance and were able to draw clear linkages between development issues and security challenges.

Furthermore, the direction from the moderator to the group to focus on development rather than hard security challenges also led participants to think much more systematically about the strategic challenges of advancing development in Afghanistan and how such work would support U.S. foreign policy goals in the country.

The result? The group immediately recognized the relationship between security, governance and development in Afghanistan. And it quickly identified the need for a counterinsurgency framework for addressing the security problem focused on protecting the local population rather than solely on military action against insurgents. The need for a viable counter-narcotics effort also was seen as integral to cutting off funding to insurgents.

Considerations of governance revolved around two issues. The first was tax and customs regulations and the second was the improvement of government ministries through men-

toring Afghan bureaucrats. The tax and customs problem emerged because of the plethora of local rules around the country and the depressive effect they had on economic growth. Standardizing tax and customs mechanisms was seen as vital for providing sustained revenue for the central government as well as fostering economic activity.

Development strategies

The discussion of development strategies was rich and detailed. It was characterized both by an understanding of the development dimensions of the security problems in Afghanistan as well as by in-depth knowledge of best development practices. Four issues dominated the conversation:

- Rural development
- Youth engagement
- Funding mechanisms
- District-level projects

Participants identified agriculture as a key to improving rural development. To do this, they recognized the need to provide greater access to credit to farmers, as well as to help enhance the entire agricultural supply chain—from production to market delivery, both domestically and internationally—so that farmers could plan their crops from one season to the next, have access to the financial capital to plan them, and have the infrastructure to sell their goods wherever they were in demand.

Youth engagement was discussed repeatedly. Ensuring appropriate economic and educational opportunities for young people (especially young men) was seen as a vital security issue. Yet the educational infrastructure in the country—particularly post-secondary vocational training and university access—is abysmal. Consequently, the group identified the need to engage youth in agriculture and animal husbandry, as well as the imperative to establish vocational institutes and revitalize universities to build the intellectual capital of the country and provide a future within Afghanistan for the brightest students.

Creating flexible civilian funding mechanisms for U.S. AID and integrating U.S. civil-military planning was seen as a major issue. It was noted repeatedly that U.S. military personnel attached with Provincial Reconstruction Teams—U.S. and NATO groups of about 100 soldiers, diplomats, and development experts deployed around the country—could begin development projects very rapidly using Commanders Emergency Response Program funds, which are administered by U.S. military commanders in the field. This single reform was viewed as critical by the group because U.S. AID funding mechanisms could take six months or longer to deliver resources to the field compared to the immediate availability of CERP funds. This delay further complicated joint planning between U.S. AID staff and military personnel, thus inhibiting the development components of successful counterinsurgency and stabilization efforts.

Finally, participants noted the need to engage in district-level development strategies even as governance reforms were pursued at the national level. It was generally agreed that Provincial Reconstruction Teams could be effective mechanisms for this, but there was some disagreement about their utility in specific circumstances.

Furthermore, participants discussed the uneven pace of development assistance across the country, with the relatively peaceful north and west receiving less funding than the more hostile east and south. This has led some local Afghans to wonder what benefits they were receiving for their cooperation with the central government and U.S. and other allied forces, and to question the utility of their continued quiescence relative to the rest of the country.

Round III–B: Operational planning in Kabul with enhanced foreign assistance tools developed by CAP’s Sustainable Security Program

Framing the problem

This round proceeded in an unexpected fashion. Rather than complete the assigned exercise of writing an operational plan for Afghanistan, participants strongly felt the need to continue with threads of the conversation articulated in Round III-A. Specifically, they wanted to evaluate changes to the authorities granted to them or changes to scenario design that might fundamentally improve the ability of the United States to promote stability in Afghanistan.

The facilitator of the group, in consultation with the scenario director, felt that the group dynamic merited this conversation. Though a number of very specific issues were raised, the group focused on four changes in policy that might prove to be “game changers” if they were adopted:

- Integrated program budgeting, planning, and execution
- U.S. Cabinet-level Department of Development
- Change in U.S. AID regulations to allow it to develop police forces
- Refocusing of U.S. military efforts on population security through counterinsurgency operations

Integrated programming

The group reiterated the need for civil-military integrated planning for development projects in Afghanistan. Given the importance of economic development to the security of the country and the requirement of security to perform development projects, participants felt these functions needed to be much more closely coordinated both at the strategic and

tactical levels. Such cooperation was impeded by the lack of a common planning framework, dramatic differences in the flexibility of funding (with the military's CERP funds much more flexible than most U.S. AID mechanisms), exponentially large differences in personnel available (with military personnel vastly outnumbering U.S. AID full-time employees), and different methodologies for hiring and monitoring contractors.

The group felt that that the coordination of development and security operations was integral to U.S. strategic success in Afghanistan, but that it would be extremely difficult to coordinate the two missions without integrating these mechanisms. Its conclusions on how to effect this sweeping change in U.S. policymaking comprised three specific recommendations:

- **Cabinet-level Department of Development.** The group noted that the application of a “3-D” strategy aligning defense, diplomacy, and development would be extraordinarily difficult as long as development was not given the same bureaucratic importance as the defense and diplomacy missions. Specifically, it noted that the creation of a Department of Development would decrease the fragmentation of various U.S. development programs, strengthen and protect budget authority for the development mission, and ensure that development professionals were included in strategic and operational planning at all levels of government.
- **U.S. AID responsibility for Afghan police training.** Despite its importance, the U.S. government does not have adequate mechanisms for deploying its own trainers to help constitute and mentor local police forces in Afghanistan or anywhere else in the world. Participants felt that it was important to revise or repeal the restrictions in Section 660 of the Foreign Assistance Act to prevent U.S. AID from engaging in police training activities. This would be a vital game changer as it would fill a critical shortcoming in U.S. and NATO strategies to stabilize Afghanistan.
- **Population security alongside counterinsurgency operations.** The group reiterated its support for a counterinsurgency approach to U.S. military operations in Afghanistan but with an emphasis on population security. While it noted that there still would be circumstances when direct action would be needed against certain targets, it was much more important to the long-term stability of the country to protect civilian populations from insurgent violence. This would help enable economic development, providing opportunities to unemployed youth, and thereby creating a virtuous cycle of activity other than armed action.

The hot wash

The final morning of the conference constituted an after-action review, or “hot wash,” during which all of the participants in the exercise (participants, observers, and staff) shared their views about the conduct of the simulation and the lessons learned from it.

The conversation started with the scenario director soliciting broad comments from the group on anything that happened during the exercise. Participants noted a number of issues, among them concern that the incremental approaches encapsulated in each successive round of the simulation were not large enough to determine how U.S. development policy in Afghanistan could substantially affect the outcome on the ground.

Yet there was wide agreement that the relaxation of rules during Round III allowed for much more creativity in developing policy options. In this regard, participants generally lauded the instruction of the facilitator to focus on development rather than security early in Round III.

After this general discussion, the scenario facilitator offered his own observations. He noted that the transformation of U.S. AID (and to some extent, the State Department) over the past 20 years into contracting agencies for development policy programming emerged as a critical constraint on effective implementation of projects in Afghanistan. Despite this, he was intrigued by the various policy proposals for catalytic approaches to development assistance that included Afghan government agencies. Rather than thinking about how the United States can provide better foreign assistance itself, he felt that many of the recommendations of the group would spark local solutions to development problems, and therefore be both self-sustaining and “owned” by the local population. This was particularly true with regard to market-based development projects.

The facilitator also noted how vital the U.S. government interagency process was, and that the lack of a development “principal” on equal footing with defense and diplomatic officials likely affected the policy options generated, especially during Round I. He added that Round I demonstrated that innovation in development programming was possible within the existing framework. The key to this, however, is to be able to identify specific operational objectives and link them to strategic goals.

Finally, he noted the significance of the group adopting a counterinsurgency framework for U.S. military operations in Afghanistan. He felt this decision represented a dramatic shift in thinking from the start of the conflict as well as recognition of the security challenge in Afghanistan and the appropriate role of military force in meeting it.

Following the facilitator's comments, the group reflected more specifically on policy lessons learned during the scenario. Among them were the following:

- Importance of development professionals in the room
- Appropriate use of development assistance in a counterinsurgency strategy
- Need for even greater tools for transformational development outcomes
- Significance of catalytic development

Development professionals

It was clear to the participants that the insertion of seasoned development professionals with decades of experience in the field and in Washington fundamentally changed the options developed during the simulation exercise for strategic planning in Afghanistan. Though their introduction was somewhat accidental and based solely on their availability,

Members of a Provincial Reconstruction Team work with Afghan partners in the country's more secure countryside.



U.S. ARMY

participants felt that their insight was invaluable and that it led the group, which already had decades of combined military/defense experience, to see problems differently and consider solutions that otherwise would not have occurred to it.

Development and counterinsurgency

The group accepted the proposition that the conflict picture across Afghanistan is heterogeneous, with one-third of the country insecure, one-third contested, and one-third relatively stable. Given this, it was broadly accepted that development assistance should be focused on the contested and stable areas. This would demonstrate the reward to the populations that are cooperating with the Afghan government and U.S. and allied military forces and demonstrate the benefits of cooperation to populations in the insecure areas. Furthermore, the inability to deliver rapid development programs following military operations in the insecure areas generally undermined the “clear-hold-build” strategy of the Bush administration and undermined the credibility of U.S., allied and Afghan government forces with the local population.

Transformational tools

The group suggested that the incremental improvements in development assistance assumed in the third round of the simulation were not enough to garner truly transformational solutions to development challenges in Afghanistan. Put differently, participants felt that the “maximalist” development tools of Round III, which were premised on CAP policy recommendations, did not go far enough. Additional tools would be required to achieve fundamentally different development outcomes.

Catalytic development

Participants recognized that the development challenges in Afghanistan were enormous and that there could never be enough development professionals deployed from the United States or its allies to meet them all. Therefore, it was vital to focus on supporting development programs that would enable local Afghans to generate their own economic opportunities and social services. Not only would this help to increase local “buy-in” of development initiatives, but such approaches were likely to be more sustainable in the long run as well as better tailored to local needs.

Analysis of the simulation

The purpose of the exercise was to determine if the adoption of the Sustainable Security recommendations for reforming foreign assistance substantially improve the ability of the U.S. government to facilitate the emergence of a stable environment in a country coping with state fragility or outright state failure—specifically in Afghanistan. The results from the simulation suggest that while the Sustainable Security recommendations are necessary to improve the U.S. government’s ability to stabilize Afghanistan, they are not sufficient in and of themselves to produce transformative outcomes.

In fact, strengthening the strategic and operational planning for development assistance within the U.S. government will have to be exceedingly robust and comprehensive if the United States is going to be successful in stabilization and reconstruction operations in Afghanistan and other trouble spots around the globe. This was the most unexpected result of the simulation—that the changes in government programs to give development assistance a more high-profile and coordinated place in government decision making were not bold enough to lead to transformational outcomes on the ground in Afghanistan.

In particular, participants repeatedly stressed the need to have integrated federal budgeting, planning, and implementation of development projects that linked the efforts of development agencies with those of the U.S. military. Specifically, U.S. AID has legal authorities and resident expertise on development issues, but the agency today does not have enough funding mechanisms that are agile enough to meet fast-changing circumstances on the ground or to engage meaningfully in the planning and execution cycles of the military.

In contrast, the U.S. military has relatively large numbers of personnel and flexible funding through its CERP program, but it does not have the development expertise to design or implement projects effectively. In the view of the participants, the Provincial Reconstruction Team model has not sufficiently addressed civil-military integration in budgeting and planning. Finally, integrated budgeting and planning is essential at the strategic level in Washington and current mechanisms are not sufficient to achieve it.

The importance of government policy integration in the development assistance process was clearly highlighted for the simulation group by the presence of development professionals. Though this was an unintended intervening variable in the simulation, the introduction of experienced and seasoned development professionals into the strategic

planning process fundamentally changed the nature of the options considered and those ultimately proposed. The instructions from the facilitator early in Round III to focus on development also contributed to this, but the feedback from the participants themselves was that the presence of senior development experts inserted ideas into the conversation that otherwise simply would not have been considered.

The general acceptance of a counterinsurgency framework for military operations in Afghanistan—without the prompting of the simulation staff—was notable. In particular, the integral relationship between development issues and security in a counterinsurgency context was a crucial finding. Yet this led to two important conclusions. The first, as noted earlier, was that current mechanisms (or even those recommended in Round III) were not sufficiently robust to integrate civil-military planning to make the non-military aspects of counterinsurgency successful. Secondly, most participants agreed that development resources should be concentrated in secure and contested environments in Afghanistan rather than in places where the fighting was worst, so that economic improvement in safer areas could have a demonstrative effect on engaging the local population in hostile areas.

The hot wash discussion after the simulation validated the CAP recommendation for the creation of a Cabinet-level Department of Development. Participants saw it as one of the ways to decrease fragmentation of development efforts across the U.S. government, to increase and protect budgets for development programs, and to ensure that development professionals were involved in foreign policy and national security discussions at every level of government. The adoption of a National Development Strategy for the United States also would dramatically reduce fragmentation of development programs. Derived from the government's National Security Strategy, a National Development Strategy could prioritize development objectives for the U.S. government around the world, link them explicitly to U.S. foreign policy objectives, and provide an intellectual basis for appropriate levels of programmatic and personnel resources for development programs relative to other elements of national security spending.

Policing emerged as a major gap in the effort to promote security and stability in Afghanistan. The identification by participants of the alteration of Section 660 of the Foreign Assistance Act to deal with this shortfall was an unexpected outcome, yet an important one for U.S. efforts in Afghanistan specifically, but also in stabilization and reconstruction operations generally.

Finally, thinking about catalytic development opportunities for Afghan government agencies and especially in the private sector was a key unexpected finding. Even with the adoption of the most robust development reforms, it is important that the governments of the United States and Afghanistan think through programs that will help the Afghans develop their own virtuous cycle of development, rather than relying on outside contractors and aid agencies to deliver services to the Afghan people.

Recommendations and conclusion

The results of our three-day simulation exercise clearly suggest that improving America's foreign assistance mechanisms would yield tangible improvements in the U.S. government's strategic and operational planning for stabilization and reconstruction missions—even after taking into account the inevitable limitations inherent in any simulation effort. With regard to Afghanistan, effective development assistance must be part of any victorious strategy. Yet there must be improved efforts to coordinate such assistance more carefully with counterinsurgency efforts, enable the Afghan government to provide services at the local level, and grant greater operational flexibility to U.S. development experts in the field. The results of the exercise yielded five major conclusions for foreign assistance reform generally and for U.S. policy toward Afghanistan in particular.

First, integrated planning and programming is essential. Foreign assistance mechanisms must be flexible and robust enough to have a strategic impact. Unless development assistance can complement U.S. military operations and diplomatic activity, it is very unlikely that dramatically improved results can be expected of U.S. policy in Afghanistan. By extrapolation, this should apply to other contingencies where the success of U.S. policy depends on its ability to foster enduring stability in a country. Therefore, the U.S. government should adopt the following steps:

- Promulgate a National Development Strategy
- Create a Cabinet-level Department for International Development
- Provide flexible funding mechanisms that allow for innovation and adaption in the field
- Create multiyear funding mechanisms that allow time for projects to start and improve
- Dramatically expand the ranks of development professionals to ensure their inclusion at all levels of planning and implementation, and create a robust expeditionary capability of development expertise
- Create bureaucratic mechanisms to take regional approaches to development assistance in order to enhance the creation of market-led growth mechanisms
- Revise Section 660 of the Foreign Assistance Act to allow U.S. AID to engage in supporting the development of national police forces

Second, counterinsurgency and development assistance strategies must work hand-in-hand. U.S. policymakers need to focus development assistance in the most secure areas first to

build momentum and demonstrate success. When civilian assistance efforts are used in conjunction with counterinsurgency operations, it is very important that the strategy for development assistance be closely linked to the counterinsurgency strategy. Therefore, the U.S. government in cooperation with the government of Afghanistan should:

- Recognize that Afghanistan is a heterogeneous environment with regard to the level of conflict
- Focus development assistance in the *most* secure regions of the country with the *least* levels of violence in order to gain development successes for the citizens there, improve governmental capacity, and provide an example to supporters of the insurgency of the benefits that come with cooperating with the government and its allies

Third, catalytic development that actively engages Afghan public- and private-sector players is critical to development success on the ground. The United States needs to use development assistance to build local capacity and solutions rather than building dependence on external support. It is impossible for the United States to deploy enough personnel in the field to meet all of the essential needs of a population, even though earning the trust of population is a critical element of any counterinsurgency strategy. As a result, the United States needs to develop:

- U.S. assistance efforts that are focused on helping the host government, civil society, and the private sector to provide essential services and economic opportunities as quickly as possible, rather than on performing such tasks directly
- In the context of Afghanistan, catalytic approaches to private-sector development, particularly agricultural programs and the extension of risk guarantees to support farmers
- Sufficient U.S. government development funding and expertise to partner effectively with the U.S. military at the development-security nexus, consistent with the general reforms advocated above.

Fourth, development professionals matter tremendously in effective strategic and operational planning. Hiring enough development professionals to put them everywhere they are needed and then empowering experienced development professionals of the appropriate rank to participate fully in strategic and operational planning would fundamentally change the development assistance process and the results likely to emerge from it. Even when security professionals recognized that achieving U.S. strategic objectives necessitated addressing the needs of the civilian population, they were far more likely to focus their efforts on conventional security and military considerations when strong development leaders were absent from the discussions.

Placing experienced development professionals in the decision-making process, however, led to consideration of creative civilian assistance programs that would advance U.S. interests. Specifically, the U.S. government should:

- Substantially increase the number of deployable U.S. development professionals who are full-time employees of the U.S. government
- Have enough development professionals to serve in key posts at the National Security Council, in all geographic combatant commands, and with every deployable U.S. Army brigade combat team and U.S. Marine Corps infantry battalion

Fifth and finally, “maximalist” measures developed by the Sustainable Security Program at the Center for American Progress to ensure that development assistance and military operations work hand-in-hand are insufficient. Strengthening foreign assistance will require more steps than we thought. Even when presented with policy options that are generally seen as the most ambitious in the current foreign assistance reform debate, the participants felt that those expanded options were insufficient to achieve the desired result. Thus, policymakers and advocates must recognize the following:

- Foreign assistance reform is urgently needed, with particular fixes required to achieve strategic objectives in Afghanistan
- Further rounds of reforms may be required to ensure development assistance is on par with defense and diplomatic capabilities as effective tools of American statecraft.

These five conclusions gleaned from our simulation scenario clearly demonstrate the utility of testing the Sustainable Security concept and policy recommendations against a real-world foreign policy challenge. Though there are limitations inherent in any undertaking of this nature, both the participants and the staff gained invaluable insights about the development challenges in Afghanistan, their relationship to U.S. policy toward the country, and the changes necessary in U.S. approaches to foreign assistance to support American objectives there and elsewhere.

Indeed, our exercise above all illustrates that foreign assistance reform is all the more urgent given its relevance to U.S. engagement in Afghanistan. The United States is unlikely to be successful in Afghanistan if it cannot support the provision of essential goods and services to the Afghan people. The Sustainable Security reforms tested in our simulation provide a useful framework for U.S. policy in that region, but much remains to be done for the U.S. government to realize the full potential of its non-military instruments of influence in Afghanistan and around the world.

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