

## Six Conditions for an Effective Transfer of Power in Afghanistan

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Even if you ignore Afghanistan's neighbors, you cannot ignore the complexity of the challenges we, our allies, and the Afghans face in making a successful transition of power. Unless we take far more realistic and effective action than we have to date, there is a significant probability that Afghanistan will go from the center ring of America's strategic circus in 2010 to an awkward cross between its freak show and its clown car by 2016.

To be specific, the White House and Executive Branch, allied capitals, UNAMA and ISAF, and aid donors need to learn from past experiences and from cases like Afghanistan and Iraq, that a successful transfer of power has six key elements.

- ***The first is the need for effective leadership, not honest elections.*** Popularly acceptable elections are desirable, but they can easily fail to have any meaning. Elections in Vietnam, in Iraq, and in other conflicts like Cambodia and the Balkans managed to be relatively honest, but still failed to produce the effective leadership necessary to bring about an acceptable internal balance of power. We need to concentrate on creating an effective mix of leaders in Kabul and the rest of the country and work towards a national balance of power. Elections are, at best, only one preliminary means to that end.
- ***The second is that leadership must be supported by an effective enough structure of governance to win sufficient popular support.*** This means governance that is present, active, honest, and effective enough in key population centers and security areas to hold significant parts of the nation together. It does not mean focusing exclusively on Kabul or the central government, it does not mean passing all aid funds through the same flawed central system, and it does not mean firing good ministers or rotating 10 governors for President Karzai's political advantage.
- ***The third is that there needs to be enough money to keep the economy and the government going.*** The lack of money and effective aid has crippled many past Transition efforts, as was the case in Vietnam. The work of the World Bank, the Afghan government, and groups like the Department for International Development (DFID) all warn that the coming cuts in military spending and aid threaten to have the same effect in Afghanistan.

The economic data to date indicate that Afghanistan may well have to revert to a heavy dependence on the export of narcotics while grappling with major capital flight. The primary issue during 2014-2017 will not be development in the traditional sense, but rather will be achieving economic stability and

avoiding an economic collapse that could severely undercut Transition efforts.

- ***The fourth is there needs to be a functional security presence in key populations centers and areas.*** This means sustaining the ANA development effort at every level from the MoD to the battalion at least through 2017, and not rushing the pace according to today's unworkable schedule. It means focusing on force performance and the resulting level of security by key district and city, and not on force generation at the national level.

It means rethinking cost and funding of the entire Afghan security effort. It means accepting the possibility that regional and local clusters of forces may be tied to given leaders and ethnic groups. It means accepting the probability that various elements of the police will become even more political and corrupt, and that local forces will be an increasingly necessary – and uncertain – evil.

- ***The fifth is that the Afghan government has to offer attractive terms for a continuing US and allied presence during Transition and in the years after 2014.*** The US now has many other higher priority strategic commitments, and is facing rising problems across the Middle East and Asia, as well as serious resource problems at home. The hard truth is that Afghanistan is not a vital strategic interest– or even a major one– in this post Bin Laden era.

The US experiences in Vietnam and Iraq are case studies that should warn Afghan and American policymakers that Afghanistan will only remain an American strategic interest so long as it provides the practical implementation of a strategic partnership, SOFA, and other arrangements that make it worthwhile to stay and pay.

- ***The final condition for a workable transfer of power is that there is a credible mix of plans, implementation, measures of effectiveness, and costs to sustain what will have to be a US-driven and funded effort well beyond 2014.*** None of this came out of the conferences in Bonn, Chicago, or Tokyo. With the exception of parts of the 1230 report, most reporting is steadily becoming spin and a repetition of the Follies in Vietnam.

And let me close by emphasizing this last point. To put it bluntly, poll after poll shows the war is losing popular support. This is the same message I get up on the Hill and from a divided White House. One key reason is there are no credible, transparent plans for the future. Official reporting is not credible and focuses far too much on spin. It does not honestly identify key risks and problems, or show that there are cost-effective solutions.

Capitals, country teams, and commands need to learn the following lesson: You do not persuade people that you can turn bullshit into chocolate by constantly praising your progress in dealing with its color and texture. You do it by showing them you can deal with its smell and its taste.

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These issues are addressed in analytic detail in the following Burke Chair studies and reports:

- ***Avoiding Creeping Defeat in Afghanistan: The Need for Realistic Assumptions, Strategy, and Plans***, <http://csis.org/publication/avoiding-creeping-defeat-afghanistan-need-realistic-assumptions-strategy-and-plans>
- ***The Afghan War: Creating the Economic Conditions and Civil-Military Aid Efforts Needed For Transition***, <http://csis.org/publication/afghan-war-creating-economic-conditions-and-civil-military-aid-efforts-needed-transition>.
- ***Back to the "Body Count:" The Lack of Reliable Data on the Wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan***, <http://csis.org/publication/back-body-count-lack-reliable-data-wars-iraq-afghanistan-and-pakistan>
- ***Afghanistan: Green on Blue Attacks Are Only a Small Part of the Problem***, <http://csis.org/publication/afghanistan-green-blue-attacks-are-only-small-part-problem>