

In a recent report, *Afghanistan After the Drawdown: U.S. Civilian Engagement in Afghanistan Post-2014* and at a May 7 panel discussion at CSIS, Jerry Hyman proposes that the civilians concentrate on good governance and economic growth while paring down their other programs to accommodate budget reductions and the possible scenarios for a post-drawdown Afghanistan.

As always, we welcome your feedback @ [HILLSGOVERNANCE@CSIS.ORG](mailto:HILLSGOVERNANCE@CSIS.ORG).

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## AFGHANISTAN: CIVILIAN ENGAGEMENT AFTER THE MILITARY DRAWDOWN

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After the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) draws down to a still-undetermined but relatively skeletal force at the end of 2014, there will still remain a substantial civilian assistance program in Afghanistan. Even though the donor pledges of \$4 billion per year will not be honored in full (in part because of donor fatigue, in part because of budget problems in the donor countries, but mostly because the government of Afghanistan has come nowhere near fulfilling its complementary commitments, especially for anticorruption and good governance), still the donor programs will be very large. What policies and strategies should guide them?

They should be scenario driven. Three very simple, in fact simplistic, scenarios are possible: optimistic, pessimistic, and “muddling through.” Each calls for a different response and also affects possibilities. Each in turn will be defined primarily by three factors in descending importance: security, governance, and economic growth. Without security, there will not be good governance, and without both, there will not be economic growth.

The security environment will depend on whether the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are able to hold their own. Even the possibility of their doing so depends in part on donor funding, but the funds will come from military budgets not civilian ones. If the ANSF perform credibly, Afghanistan has a possible optimistic future; if not, it will descend into one of the other two scenarios. The civilians have at best a small role on the security side, primarily related to the rule of law and perhaps the police. The civilians should concentrate on governance and economic growth. If the ANSF can hold their own and if governance can improve markedly, economic growth may resume.

If the security situation erodes and if the governance environment does not improve, the economic decline of the past year will accelerate and, for all three reasons, poor security, poor governance, and poor economic growth. Afghanistan will at best muddle through, losing some territory to the Taliban, regaining some, and with a country that is even less governable than now. Afghans will continue to hedge their bets between the government and the insurgency and (if possible) emigration. Capital will continue to be expatriated, investment will continue to decline, the economy will continue to slide. And if that continues, Afghanistan will

## AFGHANISTAN: CIVILIAN ENGAGEMENT AFTER THE MILITARY DRAWDOWN *(continued)*

fall from muddling through into the pessimistic scenario with a retreat into communal havens and probably civil war.

Security, governance, and economic growth are the primary determinants. Everything else—education, health, environment, democracy—is secondary: they will not determine Afghanistan’s future, however much they might improve it if the primary ingredients are successful.

The three respective scenarios determine both the kinds of civilian assistance needed and the possibility of providing it. In an optimistic environment, Afghanistan has the possibility of a bright future, assuming its neighbors are benign or neutral. Even then, primary attention should remain on the fundamental three foundational building blocks, but all of the secondary assistance programs would be possible, depending on donor funding. In the other two scenarios, almost none of the secondary programs will even be possible, let alone principal. At best, concentrating on governance and economic growth might move Afghanistan up from pessimistic to muddling through and from muddling through

to optimistic. But the odds are heavily stacked against progress once the scenarios change for the worse. Far better now to concentrate on improving governance, holding Afghanistan to its own governance commitments, and then regaining economic ground. That medicine may be harsh, but without it Afghanistan is in for some dark days. ■

*A more detailed analysis is contained in [Afghanistan after the Drawdown: U.S. Civilian Engagement in Afghanistan Post-2014](#).*

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