

Transatlantic Policy on Afghanistan and Pakistan in Obama Year One: Missed Opportunities

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>> The Obama administration's first year was characterised by somewhat enhanced transatlantic cooperation on Afghanistan, but a coordinated transatlantic policy on Pakistan remained elusive by the start of 2010. The United States and many European countries made the case for more money and troops for Afghanistan to sceptical publics. In 2009, the increased resources for Afghanistan faced muted – if any – opposition on both sides of the Atlantic. Economic troubles at home have pushed the Afghanistan war, Pakistan and most other national security issues lower on the list of public policy debates.

The US and several European countries sent more money, troops and diplomats to Afghanistan to address growing instability there. One symbol of the increased attention was the growing number of special representatives or envoys for Afghanistan and Pakistan. A few months into his job, US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke stated that he had at least two dozen counterparts around the world, many of them from Europe. The US and Europe, particularly through the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), held multiple conferences and met regularly throughout the year. These efforts were aimed at garnering additional resources and aligning tactics on an integrated civil-military strategy.

The United States committed to sending about 50,000 additional troops this year; allies including European countries will add about one fifth of the amount that the United States is sending. When the troop increases announced in 2009 are fully implemented, US troops will make up about 70 per cent of the total foreign troops in Afghanistan, up from 50 percent in 2006 – pointing to a further 'Americanisation' of a military presence that was already predominantly American. Linked

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»»»»» to the increased military presence is a civilian ‘uplift’; additional contingents of diplomats and development assistance specialists aimed at improving governance and enhancing economic development.

Although the United States and European countries increased resources and enhanced policy coordination in 2009, they also missed key opportunities, particularly the August 2009 presidential and provincial elections. The 2009 elections were marked by widespread fraud and raised questions about whether the international community has legitimate partners committed to good governance and anti-corruption in the Afghan government. It also raised questions about the capacity of the international community to provide effective assistance on electoral administration. The parliamentary elections scheduled for 2010 risk a replay of the 2009 elections without significant reform in Afghanistan and in the international bodies offering support for elections.

REVIEWS AND RENEWALS

As the NATO alliance’s first ‘out-of-area’ mission beyond Europe, the Afghanistan war represents a test of transatlantic capacity and political will to combat threats such as terrorist networks. Since the 1999 Washington Summit, NATO allies have looked to redefine the alliance’s mission and purpose, and many lessons have been learned during the course of the Afghanistan war. In the past year, Europe and the US have worked to reduce transatlantic differences over Afghanistan and move beyond the divisions created by the Iraq war.

President Obama’s outreach to Europe on Afghanistan began during the 2008 election campaign and continued through the early days of his administration. In March 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with the foreign ministers of NATO and Vice President Joe Biden met with the North Atlantic Council to discuss new strategies for Afghanistan as part of the policy review initiated by Obama. After Obama released the results of his first strategy review in late March, he travelled

to Europe in an effort to gain NATO support and European pledges for additional resources to implement the new strategy. The April 3–4 NATO summit was designed in part to demonstrate NATO unity behind the new strategy.

The Obama administration’s outreach appears to have won the support of most of the political leadership in Europe, even if it has not done much to change public opinion of the Afghanistan war in Europe. Last year was the deadliest year of the conflict for the United States and Europe, and public opinion will likely remain divided and mostly negative in the coming year, as chances of increased casualties grow. At the start of the Obama administration’s second year, five major challenges exist for maintaining transatlantic unity on Afghanistan policy:

Maintaining troop levels and overall military cooperation. The 2009 pledges for additional troops made by European countries in large part compensate for the announced troop withdrawals by the Netherlands in 2010 and Canada in 2011. Significant US troop increases combined with a continued reluctance on the part of European countries to send more is leading to a further ‘Americanisation’ of the foreign military presence in Afghanistan.

Operational exceptions – countries limiting where, when, and how their forces are used – will remain a source of tension. General McChrystal has said that despite pledges to eliminate these ‘national caveats’, certain self-imposed restrictions continue to limit operational flexibility. Some American soldiers in Afghanistan joke that ISAF, the International Security Assistance Force, stands for ‘I Saw Americans Fight’ or ‘I Stay Away from Fighting’. Another transatlantic challenge may be equipment shortages; particularly equipment for transport and attack such as helicopters. In the past NATO has at times chartered commercial helicopters for logistical supply flights.

Developing a unified and coordinated training effort for Afghan security forces. Years of effort to develop the Afghan National Army (ANA) and

the Afghan National Police (ANP) have produced disappointing results. In May 2007, the European Union (EU) accepted a NATO request to take the lead in training Afghanistan's police and established the European police (EUPOL) training mission.

The April 2008 summit saw the creation of the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A). NTM-A has a single commander for the NATO Training Mission and the US-led Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, and the United States and many European countries committed to sending additional funds and trainers to train the ANA and ANP in 2009. Implementing and executing this effort in a coordinated fashion will be a major challenge.

'Pakistan remains one of the world's most complicated security challenges – and policies remain stuck in reactive and crisis management mode'

Creating a coordinated approach on democratic reform, governance, rule of law, and anti-corruption. In 2009, the US and Europe recognised the significant challenges that remain on institutional development efforts. Officials on both sides of the

Atlantic acknowledged that supporting legitimate and credible institutions that provide decent governance and justice was central to the mission. But an effective and coordinated policy on these fronts still does not exist.

The EU created the Election Observation Mission (EOM) to monitor the presidential and regional elections in August 2009, and the EOM sent an estimated 200 observers to the elections. Despite hundreds of millions of dollars of international support for Afghanistan's election administration, major flaws such as an uneven electoral registry remained. Without significant reforms both in Afghanistan and to the international effort to support elections, the 2010 parlia-

mentary elections could face a crisis of legitimacy similar to the one witnessed in the 2009 presidential and provincial elections.

The US and European countries have developed a sophisticated, multi-layered approach to enhancing governance and supporting efforts to root out corruption. Ensuring that the implementation of these policies goes smoothly will be difficult, particularly with enduring tensions between international representatives and leaders in the Afghan central government regarding the nature of decentralisation.

The international community continues to develop plans to build a comprehensive system of rule of law. The Italian government leads the effort to support a professional judicial system. One continued source of tension between Europe and the US may be over how to handle Afghan prisoners.

Supporting a synchronised economic development strategy. The January 2010 London conference represented an attempt to showcase the effort to better coordinate political, diplomatic, and economic development steps and avoid duplication of effort. The new NATO Senior Civilian Representative Mark Sedwill, Britain's former ambassador to Afghanistan, was appointed to improve the international reconstruction effort. Although this position is not new, Sedwill is charged with making sure that aid money actually gets to the people of Afghanistan and is coordinated with the military strategy.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) are civilian-military units of varying sizes designed to improve the Afghan economy through infrastructure development and support for service delivery. These PRTs operate throughout the country; more than two dozen exist in Afghanistan. However, there is no single model for how these PRTs are composed and operate. They tend to be led by military personnel, though an effort is underway to increase the number of technical experts and the civilian contingents represented.

Coordinating transatlantic economic development efforts in Afghanistan and having a coher-



ent civilian strategy linked to the military efforts remains a challenge. Major issues such as dealing with the narcotics trade – which is relevant to economic development, governance, and reform – require special attention. Making sure that the overall civilian effort in Afghanistan is coordinated is not only a transatlantic challenge but also includes several other countries that operate bilaterally or through the United Nations. The pull-back of UN personnel in reaction to attacks in Kabul in autumn 2009 represents an additional challenge to having sufficient qualified personnel in Afghanistan.

Advancing a comprehensive diplomatic approach in Afghanistan and the region. Inside Afghanistan, the efforts to reintegrate mid- and low-level Taliban fighters as well as international diplomatic support for Afghanistan's peace and reconciliation processes will require continued transatlantic cooperation. Although there has been talk about developing new diplomatic mechanisms such as establishing a 'Contact Group' consisting of all nations that have a stake in the security of the region, a comprehensive regional diplomatic approach has yet to materialise. Transatlantic differences over questions such as how best to deal with Iran in this broader regional diplomatic context could possibly emerge in the coming year.

REACTIVE CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Across the border in Pakistan, a volatile situation grew even more dangerous as terror attacks against civilians and the government increased to unprecedented levels. Rancorous clashes for power among leaders in the civilian government escalated into a crisis in March. Although diplomatic intervention by key European governments, the United States, and other outsiders defused this crisis, tensions between the major political factions endure. The Pakistani military conducted several operations inside Pakistan to tackle certain extremist groups representing a threat to the Pakistani state. But concerns remained about the Pakistani military's ties to certain elements of the

Taliban. An assessment produced by General Stanley McChrystal, the top military commander in Afghanistan, reaffirmed the long-standing concerns that the Pakistani security establishment supports some of the insurgents working to undermine the Afghan government.

The US and Europe have only just begun to build the foundations for a viable strategy to address Pakistan's multiple security challenges. Continued military assistance and intelligence cooperation remained central to the relationship with the Pakistani government, and the US provided additional funds for counterinsurgency training and support in the last year. The US passed the Kerry-Lugar legislation, which triples non-military development assistance to Pakistan, places a higher priority on enhancing democratic governance, and sets conditions for military assistance.

But the Obama administration is only beginning to develop an implementation plan for delivering that assistance, even as it continues to have trouble spending money for previous programmes in Pakistan. A \$750 million programme focused on the Federally Administered Tribal Areas approved in 2007 had only spent about 10 per cent of its funds by the end of 2009. Like the United States, several European countries identified democratic governance, rule of law, and economic development as fundamental to success, but a fully coordinated strategy encompassing efforts by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as well as bilateral assistance programmes remained elusive.

The US and a number of European countries committed more money, personnel, and attention to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and they took important steps to increase coordination on Afghanistan. Past differences within the NATO alliance over managing the strategy in Afghanistan have subsided with more coordination efforts, but significant policy implementation challenges remain ahead. Pakistan remains one of the world's most complicated security challenges – and policies remain stuck in reactive and crisis management mode.

In 2009, the US and Europe did not achieve strategic progress on the ground in either Afghanistan or Pakistan; instead they prevented a loss and laid the foundations for a more comprehensive effort in both countries. To win back the support of sceptical publics, European countries and the United States must achieve tangible results in the coming year or risk losing further public support.

IN SEARCH OF A VIABLE STRATEGY

In contrast to the enhanced coordination on Afghanistan, the United States and Europe have yet to develop a viable strategy for Pakistan. A fairly strong consensus exists on the nature of the challenges in Pakistan and general prescriptions for dealing with those challenges. There is broad recognition that the threat perceptions of the Pakistani security establishment – particularly its overriding concerns about India – negatively impact broader regional security and have a spillover effect in Afghanistan. In addition, there are few debates about the massive institutional and economic development issues in Pakistan. The US and Europe have outlined general strategies for boosting the civilian government in Pakistan and supporting democratic reform: the challenge is coordinating military assistance to Pakistan, conducting diplomacy with Pakistan and the region and implementing economic and institutional development programs with a meaningful impact.

Pakistan represents a more complicated challenge than Afghanistan. It is five times more populous than Afghanistan; it has a security establishment with one of the largest militaries in the world, which has intervened in its politics numerous times; and it possesses nuclear weapons.

Pakistani policy remains reactive to events on the ground and tactical in nature – dealing with issues such as responses to the problems of internally displaced people from internal conflicts in the north and western part of the country consume much time and attention. A coordinated civilian

and diplomatic strategy integrated with military assistance and calibrated to support political and governance reform remains incomplete.

The ‘Friends of Pakistan’ initiative has helped to foster greater international focus on economic development strategies for Pakistan, but has not yet produced a coherent strategy that exercises leverage and creates incentives for comprehensive reform. The United States and Europe are only in the early stages of creating a comprehensive strategic policy to address Pakistan’s multiple security challenges.

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