



U.S. Policy in Afghanistan: Countering Insurgents

Dr. Roger Kangas

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The war in Iraq dominates media and public debates and often overshadows the campaign in Afghanistan. However, the news of an intensifying insurgency in Afghanistan and increased U.S. troop deployments are strong signals that this conflict deserves closer attention. CERES was pleased to present Dr. Roger Kangas, National Defense University and Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service adjunct faculty member, who addressed the general security, political and economic environments in Afghanistan during his lecture “U.S. Policy in Afghanistan: Countering Insurgents.”



**Dr. Roger Kangas and CERES
Director Dr. Angela Stent**

Dr. Kangas began by analyzing the challenges facing the U.S. in Afghanistan in 2008, highlighting a number of recent developments which will hamper the counter-insurgency campaign. Suicide-bombings have been on the rise and have been targeted in particular against Afghan officials. Drug production has skyrocketed, with the revenues used for financing Taliban attacks. The insurgents have also orchestrated a more sophisticated public relations campaign that seeks to portray the coalition forces as the main enemy of the Afghan people. Another challenge is the perception that the Afghan government is a puppet of the West and that the president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, is ‘the mayor of Kabul.’ Dr. Kangas stressed that the Taliban sees itself as a separate organization from Al-Qaeda. It is important to consider this in the context of discussing strategies to counter the anti-coalition forces in Afghanistan. In terms of coalition efforts to respond to the insurgents, Dr. Kangas pointed out that emphasizing the legitimacy of the Afghan government is very crucial. He also noted that a more unified coalition command structure would make the counter-insurgency efforts far more successful. At this point, each national component of the multinational force has its own limitations and perceptions and this prevents a more cohesive counter-insurgency effort from taking place.

Dr. Kangas also noted the influence of regional and international factors on the situation in Afghanistan. The campaign in Afghanistan has suffered financially due to the war in Iraq, while intra-NATO friction is another major obstacle to an effective Afghanistan campaign. This friction has manifested itself in the reluctance of NATO members to contribute troops to the mission in Afghanistan as well as in the limitations on troop deployments for some NATO member troops already there. In addition, regional actors like Pakistan and Iran have significant

influence over the situation in Afghanistan. A positive development with regards to Pakistan has been that from the Pakistani military perspective, there is a sense that the Pakistani and Afghanistan campaigns are linked and that success in one will have positive spillover effects for the other. Iran has significant influence in western Afghanistan and the continuing tensions between Iran and the West are likely to have repercussions for Afghanistan.

In the question and answer session, the mini-surge of 3,000 additional troops to be deployed by the U.S. to Afghanistan was also discussed. Participants noted that one aspect of the mini-surge was that these extra troops would replace the troops from other countries that will be redeploying from Afghanistan. In terms of a future trajectory, Dr. Kangas pointed out that the insurgency will likely continue with modest levels of success. He also emphasized the need for an increased commitment to Afghanistan internationally, and for a greater focus on micro-assistance in Afghanistan. The latter is particularly crucial in light of this year's record poppy crop. Those gathered agreed that Afghanistan deserves greater international attention and financial commitments, and that without such efforts the Afghan leadership and people will be hard pressed to meet the political, economic and security challenges facing their country.

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