

Alex Bellah

South Asian instability is inherently threatening to U.S. national security. While opportunities exist to stabilize Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the region at large, these are hampered by limited resources. Long term U.S. success rests upon stability in Pakistan, Afghanistan, the eventual withdrawal of military forces, and the economic prosperity of the region. A South Asian strategy will include an extended counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy in Afghanistan, combined with continued aid to strengthen government and economic institutions in the region, while incorporating our regional allies to provide long term stability.

We endorse a counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy supplemented by counterterrorism (CT), implemented primarily in the southern and eastern portions of Afghanistan. The focus will be on enhancing the Afghan National Security Forces' capacity to provide security throughout the country, and specifically in the regions currently under Taliban control. This strategy will include a substantial short term increase of American forces in the South and East of Afghanistan intent on clearing, holding, and building the local communities. Through direct physical security and the provision of economic opportunity we will enable Pashtun citizens to safely switch allegiance in favor of the Afghan government. For those Taliban unwilling to support the Government of Afghanistan, we will continue a CT policy both in inaccessible portions of Afghanistan and where they exist in Pakistan. We will increase cooperation with Pakistani forces, including the extension of drone strikes on targets of interest to Pakistan. The end goal is a long term U.S. relationship that respects both nations' autonomy.

Long term peace and stability in Afghanistan requires a legitimate government and increased standard of living. The U.S. should support the creation of a stable infrastructure which supports the expansion of agriculture, health, and education. This would include public works projects consisting of irrigation for alternative cash crops and vocational schools to provide employment and a source of livelihood independent of the Taliban or opium trade. The Afghan government must take the lead on

this project while being adequately funded by the international community, in order to create both domestic legitimacy as well as the skills to ensure future governance.

Regional support is integral to achieving economic stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan. India, China, and Iran should all be incorporated in ensuring that Afghanistan does not become a failed state hosting regional proxies. To this end, the U.S. should encourage direct investment in infrastructure projects in Afghanistan and adopt a long-term policy goal of an integrated South Asian economy, where surrounding nations hold a significant economic stake.

The U.S. should support a multi-faceted strategy for improving governance in Afghanistan. The first step would be to undertake an Afghan national census in order to promote more equitable parliamentary representation and distribution of resources. We also support a campaign to mobilize the public behind President Karzai, particularly in light of recent unrest surrounding the controversial elections. The primary component of this campaign will be a national effort to ensure the image of Karzai is associated with aid projects coming down through the government. We acknowledge that good governance in Pakistan is integral to success in Afghanistan, and therefore propose that the U.S. fund efforts to encourage an autonomous judiciary and increase immediate civilian oversight over its intelligence agencies, with the long term goal of civilian oversight of the entire military.

Regional stability in South Asia is also threatened by the presence of nuclear weapons. The U.S. must continue to help stabilize Pakistan—through financial support of Pakistan’s military and domestic police force, as well as increase efforts to bolster nuclear security, both in terms of information proliferation and physical security. India is a major player in the region, and the U.S. should support a Kashmir resolution while also exerting pressure on both Pakistan and India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. This joint diplomatic gesture would diminish mutual distrust and help moderate support for proxy groups operating against each other, further stabilizing the region and increasing the chance for success in Afghanistan.

Through a combined COIN strategy and extended support to the region the United States can help overcome substantial obstacles. We envision a continued, long-term relationship between all of the regional players and the United States: one devoted to respect for sovereignty, economic prosperity, and opportunity for the region's population.