

AMSPECBLOG

## Whither the Afghan War?

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The administration has issued a cautiously positive assessment of the war in Afghanistan. It sees gains, though they are fragile:

While the momentum achieved by the Taliban in recent years has been arrested in much of the country and reversed in some key areas, these gains remain fragile and reversible. Consolidating those gains will require that we make more progress with Pakistan to eliminate sanctuaries for violent extremist networks. Durability also requires continued work with Afghanistan to transfer cleared areas to their security forces.

Of course, the biggest problem is that the Afghan government is not an effective partner and is widely distrusted, and often hated, by Afghans, at least those who are not on its payroll. After nine years of nation-building, we haven't built much of a nation. Thus, it is hard to create anything permanent to solidify the American military's successes.

Indeed, while the Taliban has been losing ground in Kandahar, it has been expanding in the north. And the Red Cross reports that security is growing worse, threatening its humanitarian mission. Reports the New York Times:

The International Committee of the Red Cross, which usually seeks to avoid the public eye, held a rare news conference here on Wednesday to express deep concern that Afghanistan security had deteriorated to its worst point since the overthrow of the Taliban nine years ago and was preventing aid groups from reaching victims of conflict.

All this after nine years of war.

Afghanistan is a great tragedy, but there's no good security argument for staying trying to make it better. Al-Qaeda has largely moved to Pakistan: terrorists can operate most anywhere. Who rules Kabul isn't likely to affect al-Qaeda's operations much. There's an obvious humanitarian interest in creating a liberal, pro-Western central government in Afghanistan. But after nine years all the U.S. has managed to do is install a corrupt regime for which few Afghans want to die. Americans shouldn't be dying for it either.

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