



Cato report says Afghan 'victory' unlikely

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The U.S. military can pull most of its troops from Afghanistan in the next year as "victory" is not a realistic outcome, a report by the Cato Institute says.

Malou Innocent and Ted Galen Carpenter in an authoritative report on the conflict in Afghanistan note that "a definitive, conventional 'victory' is not a realistic option."

Washington said its strategy in Afghanistan is focused in part on denying al-Qaida and other militants the opportunity to establish a safe haven in the embattled nation. The authors, however, opine that denying a sanctuary to terrorists does not require a sustained military presence or the pacification of the entire country.

Instead, the Cato report advocates U.S. support for a national security force capable of maintaining order independently.

On intelligence and regional relations, the report calls for the increased use of aerial surveillance and covert operations in an effort to undermine the regional terrorist threat.

"Seek cordial relations with all of Afghanistan's neighbors, particularly Russia and Iran, as each has the means to significantly undermine or facilitate progress in the country," the report adds.

The report further recommends a focus on drug cartels rather than "harassing" local farmers with few alternative options outside of opium.

With little strategic value, the U.S. engagement in Central Asia risks extending to an "an open-ended occupation and nation-building mission" if the majority of combat forces remain in Afghanistan beyond 18 months, the authors conclude.

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