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Spinning Us to Death

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|
December 13, 2010

[Malou Innocent](#)^[2]

Last week, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said that progress in the Afghan war has "exceeded" his expectations^[3]. I'm prepared to believe that Gates's expectations were probably far too high to begin with, but they are extraordinarily so considering the pessimistic expectations of Afghans recently surveyed^[4] by a joint *Washington Post*, *ABC*, and *BBC News*. It found that Afghans interviewed are less confident in the ability of the United States and its allies to provide security. Nationwide, more than half said that U.S. and NATO forces should begin to leave the country by mid-2011 or earlier.

Ahead of a major White House review of its Afghan strategy^[5], the most recent incidents of violence^[6] against American soldiers certainly don't help the administration's latest effort to galvanize public support for the war.

As an aside, my friend [Gilles Dorronsoro](#)^[7] signed a letter to President Obama urging him to change the American strategy in Afghanistan:

Despite these huge costs, **the situation on the ground is much worse than a year ago** because the Taliban insurgency has made progress across the country. It is now very difficult to work outside the cities or even move around Afghanistan by road. The insurgents have built momentum, exploiting the shortcomings of the Afghan government and the mistakes of the coalition. The Taliban today are now a national movement with a serious presence in the north and the west of the country. Foreign bases are completely isolated from their local environment and unable to protect the population. Foreign forces have by now been in Afghanistan longer than the Soviet Red Army.

(...)

The 2014 deadline to put the Afghan National Army in command of security is not realistic. Considering the quick disappearance of the state structure at a district level, it is difficult to envision a strong army standing alone without any other state institutions around. Like it or not, the Taliban are a long-term part of the Afghan political landscape, and we need to try and negotiate with them in order to reach a

diplomatic settlement. **The Taliban's leadership has indicated its willingness to negotiate**, and it is in our interests to talk to them. In fact, the Taliban are primarily concerned about the future of Afghanistan and not – contrary to what some may think -- a broader global Islamic *jihad*. Their links with Al-Qaeda – which is not, in any case, in Afghanistan any more -- are weak. We need to at least try to seriously explore the possibility of a political settlement in which the Taliban are part of the Afghan political system. The negotiations with the insurgents could be extended to all groups in Afghanistan and regional powers.

Check out the full text of the letter, and the list of signatories, [here](#) [8].

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[4] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/06/AR2010120601788.html>

[5] <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6BC2DQ20101213>

[6] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/12/AR2010121200857_pf.html

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[8] <http://www.afghanistancallforeason.com/>