

## **Afghanistan Disengagement: Balancing Security, Foreign and Domestic Policy Implications. A Transatlantic Dialogue.**

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On May 25, 2010, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) and the Canadian International Council (CIC) convened a multi-national panel discussion in Ottawa to provide a public forum for issues surrounding the disengagement of troops from Afghanistan. The panel consisted of a number of notable figures, including present and past members of the German Parliament, Canadian Members of Parliament and policy experts from the US.

Chaired by Carleton Professor Mira Sucharov, the evening's discussion began with a keynote address by long-standing Member of the Bundestag Hans-Ulrich Klose, who was recently appointed Coordinator of German-American Relations by the German government. Klose emphasized the growing public support in Germany for withdrawal, which he felt went against the initiative to fulfill the duties dictated by the UN Security Council. Klose provided an analysis of US perceptions of an "attack on world peace", which, from his perspective, began the moment the World Trade Center buildings collapsed. Klose explained that the US chose to defend itself under Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty, rather than under Article 5, in which a NATO coalition would defend itself collectively when another NATO member is attacked. This may have been a poor choice, Klose opined, as states were therefore not obligated to join the US Afghanistan mission unless they chose to. Additionally, the United States' hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan to Iraq may have allowed the Taliban to recover force.

Turning to Afghanistan in particular, Klose highlighted two goals: preventing Afghanistan from becoming a stronghold for terrorism and preventing a return to civil war. Since Afghanistan is considered by many to be a "failed state", it is unable to handle terrorist attacks - building a stable, democratic state is not easily accomplished in six to eight years and could take another generation. Turning to the German experience, Klose explained that Germany's public understood that German forces were in Afghanistan for stabilization purposes, but they did not make the connection to NATO support. Klose concluded by reiterating Germany's support for ISAF and a prolonged mandate even while admitting that Germany is likely to withdraw along with the US. Klose was disappointed to note that the Obama administration's timeline to withdraw from Afghanistan was not based on conditions on the ground, and did not engage a regional approach.

Following Mr. Klose's remarks, additional guest experts were invited to present their points of view. The following points drove the panel discussion and prompted feedback from the audience:

- Germany's participation in Afghanistan is something new for Germans, and has been reflected as such in media, film, and literature. Politically, participation in Afghanistan was decided by the Parliament with input from constituencies, which differs from the US system.
- Canada's decision to leave Afghanistan in July 2011 applies only to troops in Kandahar, not Afghanistan as a whole.
- Under NATO, all countries must justify participation to their respective constituents. A rift is evident where the expectation of voters differs in the US and the EU.
- In 2001, Canada's involvement in Afghanistan was not understood as it is today. The Canadian Department of National Defence did not originally understand the web of interrelated actors, but today understands that NATO members should engage with the surrounding states.
- Canada should support Afghan engagement with governance through justice, border controls, an independent human rights commission, and a development and solidarity fund. These efforts should be supported by Afghan community leaders.
- Under President Obama, the US has reinvigorated its military, security, and civil commitment to Afghanistan by reorienting its regional diplomacy involvement away from Iraq. The US has also spent nearly \$50BN for reconstruction – though success stories are hindered by reports of widespread corruption.
- The original political objective of the United States' involvement in Afghanistan in 2001 was to disrupt, dismantle and defeat the Taliban. There is no clear method to measure progress in Afghanistan, so the United States' involvement in Southern Afghanistan could be used to assess its ability to address human development challenges.
- The US sees four main challenges in Afghanistan: 1. It is unclear how to measure success and what the international community wants to achieve in Afghanistan; 2. US strategy is not in line with its partners (EU, Afghanistan); 3. Lack of civil capacities and development; 4. Regional dimension (need for a regional political solution).
- Canada's position in Afghanistan is tenuous – the House of Commons has not responded to issues to the satisfaction of the Canadian public. One of these important issues is the fact that Canada has lost more soldiers per capita than any other involved nation.
- Key challenges in Afghanistan involve building a nation in a failed state, and creating a central government in a country without a history of central governance.
- The 2011 withdrawal date from Afghanistan is contentious, yet Canada cannot leave Afghanistan entirely without abandoning local police systems and economic engagement.

- Some contend that Canada's biggest security threat is homegrown, since groups within Canada have become a threat. To ensure domestic security, Canada must do a better job of integrating the Muslim population.

Following the panel discussion, the audience raised a number of concerns which sparked debate around the key points mentioned above. Highlights of the audience remarks included the following:

- Using the title "disengagement" for the event appears simplistic. Canada's disengagement requires a reassurance of civilian engagement once military forces depart.
- The notion that Afghanistan is a failed state is defeatist - it gives the impression that it is incurable. The focus should be on prescription, rather than incurability. Further, carrying out a mission on the basis of failure further encourages and strengthens terrorists.
- The argument that Afghanistan lacks a central government is wrong as it has a central state.
- It is not a war that is taking place in Afghanistan, but an insurgency which to win must involve winning the hearts and minds of the people, especially youth who become attracted to participation in the insurgency.
- The conflict in Afghanistan is regional - it was Al Qaeda, not the Taliban, which attacked the United States. Countries such as Yemen and Northwest Africa must be considered.
- Barriers to capacity and development are foremost in Afghanistan, as many older and younger people are illiterate.
- The discussion should switch from disengagement to engagement in Afghanistan in 2011, including a look at which mistakes were made by the international community and how to adopt a realistic approach to education and state building.
- Canada's ability to deal with various groups and ethnicities is a benefit to our role in Afghanistan, along with our ability to support governance.
- Statistics such as troop numbers, election woes and timelines have been foils to the real issues: capacity building and development experts are needed, along with leadership.
- Local structures should be more involved in developing Afghanistan's future, allowing the local population to accept leadership based on a vision supplied by President Hamid Karzai. This has not occurred, as many provincial council members are unclear on their respective roles.
- Low levels of public support for Western involvement are indicative of perception: the defense approach must be toned down in favor of the argument to stay in Afghanistan for development reasons.